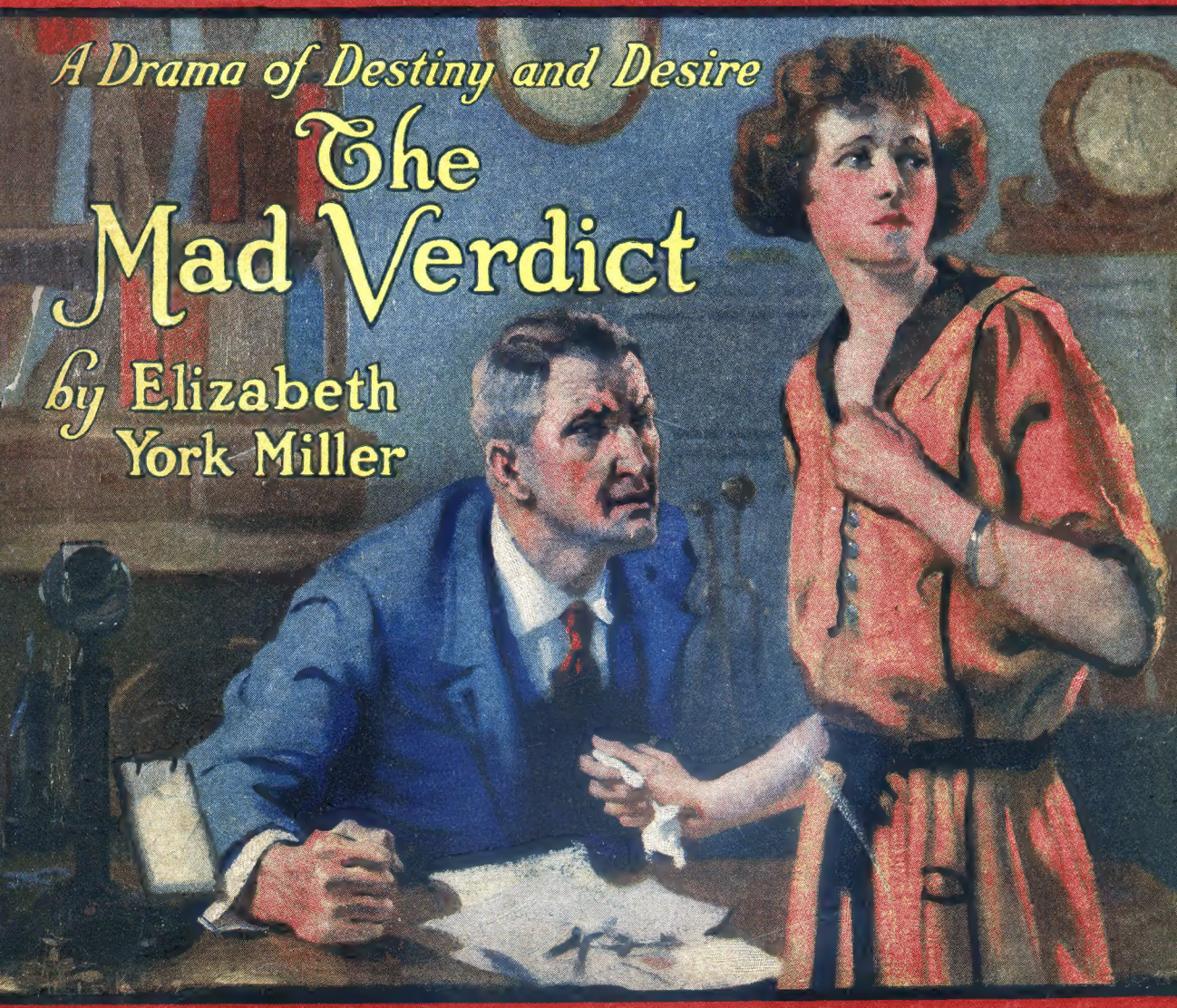
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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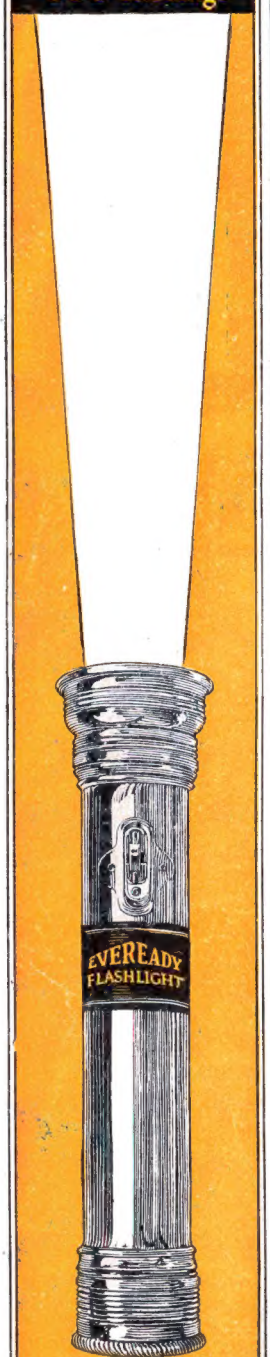
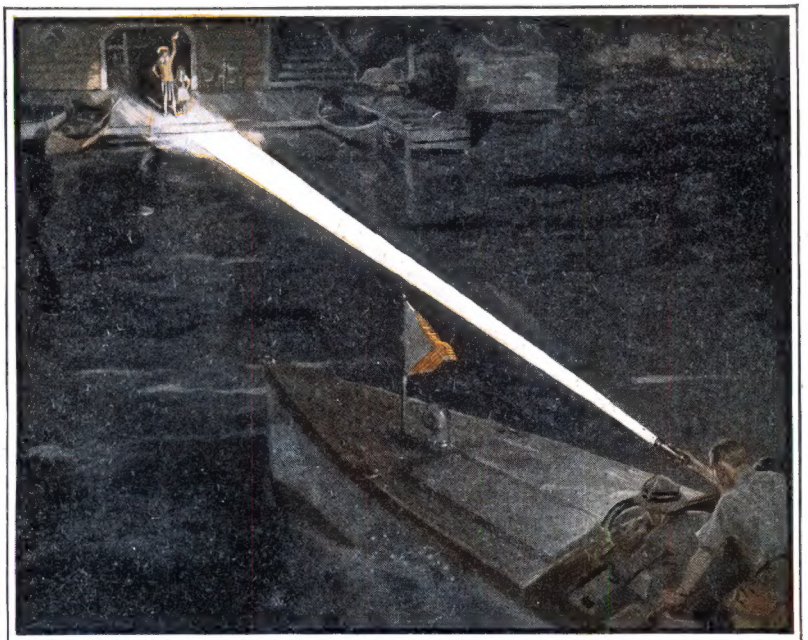
Eveready Spotlight with the 300-ft. Range



There's an Eveready Flashlight complete for every purpose from $1.35 to $4



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Vacation time again! And this Eveready Spotlight, ***with its 300-ft. shaft of electric brilliance,*** adds more enjoyment to the evenings than anything else in the kit! A handy necessity for motor boating, canoeing, or rowing; going over to the dance; flashing signals; strolling down the road; emergency use in your automobile; lighting the way everywhere.

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Eveready Flashlight Batteries give brighter light; last longer; fit and improve all makes of flashlights

EVEREADY FLASHLIGHTS & BATTERIES

"Don't wait until it's too late"

"WHEN I was your age, Tom, I was just where you are today. I had what was then considered a good job in Black & Turner's Accounting Department. My friends predicted great things for me.

"Then your mother and I were married and pretty soon we began to need more money. But when I discussed the salary question with the head of the department he told me that the firm was paying me all my work was worth.

"It has been the same way ever since. Man after man has been advanced over my head while I have just plodded along. And the pity of it is that a single word would have changed my whole life!

"Training! That was all I needed.

"I had as much energy and as good a brain as any of the men who went ahead of me, but when the bigger jobs opened up I wasn't equipped to step into them.

"Don't wait until it's too late, Tom. My own life would be a different story if some one had only talked to me when I was young as I am talking to you today."

ASK any man of 40 or 50 what he would do if he could only go back and start over and he will tell you that he would study his work.

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This is particularly true of the young man in business. For business is becoming more complex every day. And as it becomes more complex, there is increasing demand for men who are trained to do some one thing well.

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Why not at least find out what the I. C. S. can do for you? It takes but a moment to mark the work of your choice, tear out and mail the coupon printed below. There's no obligation and not a penny of cost, yet that one single act may be the means of changing your whole life. Today—not "Tomorrow"—is the day to take your first definite step toward Success.

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIV CONTENTS FOR JULY 8, 1922 NUMBER 1

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McCARTY INCOG.

With craft and wisdom the astute ex-policeman spots the slayer of a a heartless and beautiful woman.

First of six parts in next week's ARGOSY-ALLSTORY.

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How YOU Can Write Stories and Photoplays

By ELINOR GLYN

Author of "Three Weeks," "Beyond the Rocks," "The Great Moment," Etc., Etc.

FOR years the mistaken idea prevailed that writing was a "gift" miraculously placed in the hands of the chosen few. People said you had to be an Emotional Genius with long hair and strange ways. Many vowed it was no use to try unless you'd been touched by the Magic Wand of the Muse. They discouraged and often scoffed at attempts of ambitious people to express themselves.

These mistaken ideas have recently been proved to be "bunk." People know better now. The entire world is now learning the TRUTH about writing. People everywhere are finding out that writers are no different from the rest of the world. They have nothing "up their sleeve"; no mysterious magic to make them successful. They are plain, ordinary people. They have simply learned the principles of writing and have intelligently applied them.

Elinor Glyn

Of course, we still believe in genius, and not everyone can be a Shakespeare or a Milton. But the people who are turning out the thousands and thousands of stories and photoplays of to-day for which millions of dollars are being paid ARE NOT GENIUSES.

You can accept my advice because millions of copies of my stories have been sold in Europe and America. My book, "Three Weeks," has been read throughout the civilized world and translated into every foreign language, except Spanish, *and thousands of copies are still sold every year.* My stories, novels and articles have appeared in the foremost European and American magazines. For Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, greatest motion picture producers in the world, I have written and personally supervised such photoplays as, "The Great Moment," starring Gloria Swanson, and "Beyond the Rocks," starring Miss Swanson and featuring Rodolph Valentino. I have received thousands and thousands of dollars in royalties. I do not say this to boast, but merely to prove that you can be successful without being a genius.

Many people think they can't write because they lack "imagination" or the ability to construct out-of-the-ordinary plots. Nothing could be further from the truth. The really successful authors—those who make fortunes with their pens—are those who write in a simple manner about plain, ordinary events of every-day life—things with which everyone is familiar. This is the real secret of success—a secret within the reach of all, for **everyone** is familiar with **some** kind of life.

Every heart has its story. Every life has experiences worth passing on. There are just as many stories of human interest right in your own vicinity, stories for which some editor will pay good money, as there are in Greenwich Village or the South Sea Islands. And editors will welcome a story or photoplay from you just as quickly as from any well-known writer if your story is good enough. They are eager and anxious for the work of new writers, with all their blithe, vivacious, youthful ideas. They will pay you well for your ideas, too. Big money is paid for stories and scenarios to-day—a good deal bigger money than is paid in salaries.

The man who clerked in a store last year is making more money this year with his pen than he would have made in the store in a lifetime. The young woman who earned eighteen dollars a week last summer at stenography just sold a photoplay for $500.00. The man who wrote the serial story now appearing in one of America's leading magazines hadn't thought of writing until about three years ago—he did not even know that he could. Now his name appears almost every month in the best magazines. **You don't know whether you can write or not until you try.**

I believe there are thousands of people who can write much better stories and plays than many we now read in magazines and see on the screen. I believe thousands of people can make money in this absorbing profession and at the same time greatly improve present-day fiction with their fresh, true-to-life ideas. I believe the motion picture business especially needs new writers with new angles. I believe this so firmly that I have decided to give some simple instructions which may be the means of bringing success to many who have not as yet put pen to paper. I am going to show YOU how easy it is when you know how!

Just fill out the coupon below. Mail it to my publishers, The Authors' Press, Auburn, N. Y. They will send you ABSOLUTELY FREE, a handsome little book called **"The Short-Cut to Successful Writing."** This book was written to help all aspiring people who want to become writers, who want to improve their condition, who want to make money in their spare time. Within its pages are many surprises for doubting beginners; it is crowded with things that gratify your expectations—good news that is dear to the heart of all those aspiring to write; illustrations that enthuse, stories of success; new hope, encouragement, helps, hints—things you've long wanted to know.

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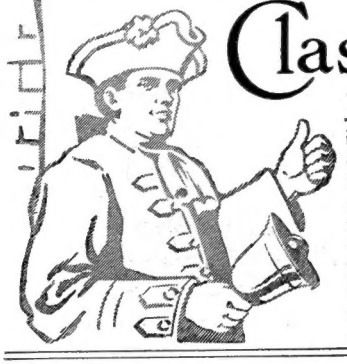

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

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Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 2% cash discount
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August 12th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close July 15th.

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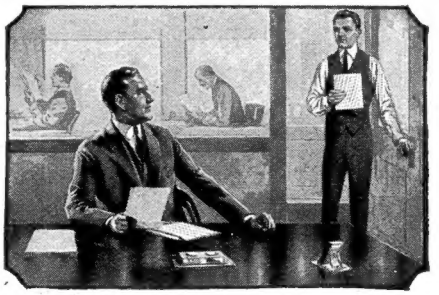

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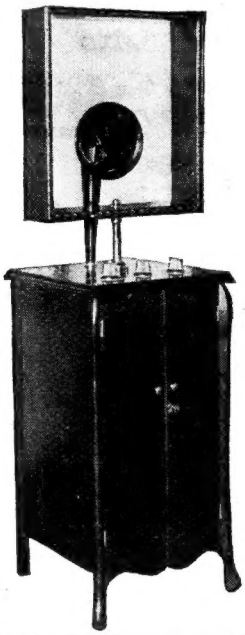

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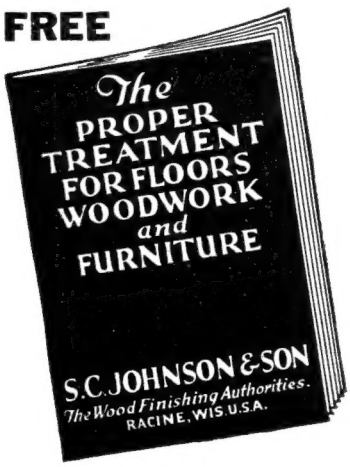

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIV SATURDAY, JULY 8, 1922 NUMBER 1

The Mad Verdict

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER

Author of "Doubles or Quits," "Her Phantom Lover," "The Greatest Gamble," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE STREET OF DEATH.

"YOU really want the truth?"

"If you please, Sir Ridgeworth."

The famous surgeon moistened his lips slightly as he regarded his young patient. It was not the first time he had passed sentence of death upon a man. Only yesterday he had had a case similar to this. Curious—two of them coming so close together.

"Then I am very sorry to say, Mr. Lennox, that I can hold out to you the hope of not more than six months of life. In fact, it may be less—but not more."

"Six months," David Lennox echoed blankly.

He was no coward. During the war he had faced sudden death a thousand times without giving it more than the passing thought or prayer which may rise to the lips of any soldier in action.

But this was different. There was something so calculated and cold-blooded in the bald pronouncement. He found himself trembling, felt that he had gone deathly pale, and a miserable faintness threatened him when he thought of Enid Westmore. Enid and he were pledged secretly to marry as soon as he had made his way a little more in the world. She was a rich man's only child, petted, spoiled, and intolerably proud, yet she had melted into the humblest of love's serving-maids because she adored David.

The young man cleared his throat, but

even then his voice was husky when he spoke.

"Dr. Jackson thought perhaps you would advise an operation," he said. "I would rather—"

"Utterly useless, my boy," Sir Ridgeworth Bevans cut in. "If there was the slightest good, you may be sure I would advise it also. Nothing can be done for you. I wish to heaven it were possible."

David stared at him with dulled eyes. The great specialist was not a handsome man, but just now he appeared to his patient to be utterly repulsive. Small of body, with a domed head too big in proportion, slightly protruding blue eyes behind horn-rimmed spectacles, the nose of an eagle, and the mouth of an autocrat, Sir Ridgeworth Bevans bore a strong physical resemblance to one of those uncanny, gnomelike creatures of the Black Forest. Yet, of his day and profession there was no one more eminent, more reliable or thoroughly to be depended upon.

He had, it is true, a certain reputation for ruthlessness, not to be confused with brutality. He was a vivisectionist by conviction, an omnivorous student, a philosopher and—an atheist.

He rose as David was going and reached up to lay a hand on the young man's shoulder. He was shorter than David by half a head.

"You wanted to know the truth, my boy, and I think you are wise. You might wish to make or alter plans to fit the circumstances—"

"Yes, I shall," David replied.

He was glad to get out of the cold, clean house in Harley Street; glad to get out of the street itself.

"The Street of Death," he said to himself, for that was what it seemed to be.

What a gap lay between the emotions of to-day and yesterday!

Leaning back in the taxicab, he closed his eyes for a moment and tried not to think. It was too late, now, to make an excuse for the week-end invitation he had accepted to "Old Ways," Adrian Westmore's delightful country house in Hampshire. His luggage was here with him in the cab; the train due to leave in half an hour. Being Whitsuntide, he had given his manservant a holiday, and his rooms would be comfortless and intolerable over the week-end. Besides, he would simply go mad with mere loneliness, and probably blow out his brains if left to himself, until the first shock of the death sentence was over.

Was it only yesterday?

Dr. Jackson had said "You'd better see Sir Ridgeworth Bevans. Very likely he will advise an operation. I will make an appointment for you."

Until then David had not imagined there was anything very much the matter with him other than the aftermath of a bad attack of poison gas. Thousands of young men had had the same trouble, and lately he had fancied himself ever so much improved. His appetite was better, his skin clear, and he had begun to put on weight. Then it appeared that a splinter of shrapnel lodged near his heart was responsible for the trouble, not the poison gas. At least that was Sir Ridgeworth Bevans's diagnosis.

And they could do nothing.

David looked an ordinary and healthy enough specimen of young manhood as he got out of the cab at Waterloo. Tall, broad-shouldered, sunny-haired, and, normally, sunny-tempered, he elbowed his way to the first-class booking office, followed by a porter with his bags and golf sticks.

The station was crowded with holiday-makers, all hurrying, jostling, good-humored about the business of getting away. Poor human beings! Would they have acted differently had each known more or less definitely the hour of his death? David himself was not acting differently; at least, not yet.

The weather promised to be glorious. Old Ways and Enid—their most amazing love secret—the enchantment of mid-May! It was difficult to grasp all at once that for him there would never be another month of May.

Nor any Enid.

That was the strangest thing of all. How and when was he to tell her?

A woman ahead of him at the booking office collided with him slightly as she

reached for her change and ticket, and then her bag slipped from her hand. He stooped and picked it up for her, while she exclaimed at her carelessness. Thanking him, her eyes met David's for an instant and he was conscious of a sense of piercing regard. Black eyes they were, set in a pale, beautiful face—the face of an angel or a devil.

Where on earth had he seen her before? Or her photograph?

He pushed on to the train, and found himself in possession of a corner seat. The woman who had dropped her hand bag was directly opposite.

The carriage was crowded, and for a long hour and a half David Lennox sat alone with his thoughts.

Within six months he was going to die. The renowned specialist of Harley Street had doomed him. He sat stiffly, staring straight ahead, busy with the strange and dreadful idea. For it was dreadful.

He had so much to live for, with youth, and love, and the hope of worldly success. Curious, that he had been promised a partnership, in about six months, in the brokerage firm where he had sunk the modest capital that was his heritage! In time he might have become a rich man himself, and worthy, from a material viewpoint, of old Adrian Westmore's daughter. They had planned to get Enid's father's consent when David was made a partner in the firm.

At Southampton there was no one left in the carriage but the woman opposite and David, and nobody else got in. It was still three-quarters of an hour to Stockley.

Scarcely had the train started again when the woman spoke to him. She said, "I wonder if you can possibly be David Lennox?"

He had all but forgotten her presence.

"Yes, I am," he replied, courteously, "and I seem to have seen you before somewhere."

She laughed, disclosing teeth like pearls. It was a seductive face, eyes narrowing, the upper lip lifted oddly at one corner, as though inviting a kiss. Young? Possibly twenty-five or six.

"I don't think we've ever met," she replied, "and I must be honest. I knew who you were from the labels on your bags. My name is Adela Montrose. I believe my husband was a brother officer of yours. He used to speak of you often."

Then, of course, David remembered. Poor Billy Montrose had fallen during the same engagement from which David himself, at this date, had received his own death sentence. He saw by her dress that Billy's widow was emerging rapidly from her mourning. Well, why not It was nearly two years ago. Would Enid remember him vividly two years hence? He did not want her to mourn, but he hoped, rather wistfully, that she would not altogether—forget.

How often had Billy Montrose shown him the photograph of this beautiful woman! Poor, poor Billy. He had had such plans for his future, too.

In a few moments David found himself talking to Mrs. Montrose as he could never, things being what they were, have talked to Enid. It was a purely human craving for sympathy that would not be denied. The shock had thrown him off his balance for the moment.

She was the widow of his best friend, that friend who had gone before, and who would certainly, if it were possible, be waiting for him at the gates when he passed over. The thought of Billy soothed the sting of approaching dissolution, but could not altogether rob it of its melancholy.

She drew the whole story from him except, of course, Enid Westford's name and identity.

Her lips were whiter than David's as he told her. It was a problem, and it seemed to him that he could not solve all its intricacies by himself.

"But doctors—even great doctors—are often wrong," she said.

He mentioned the specialist's name, and she gave an angry exclamation.

"Of course I know Sir Ridgeworth's reputation. But he ought to be hung for telling you." Then she inquired, in a lowered voice, "What are you going to do?"

"I haven't had time to think much about it," David replied slowly. "You see it doesn't seem real to me, yet. I shall have to tell her, the girl I—hoped to marry."

"And then?"

"Oh, I don't know—just 'carry on,' I dare say."

"You won't do anything—well, desperate?" Mrs. Montrose made her voice carelessly light, but she was deeply moved, for all that.

"I don't think so. I'm not that sort. Indeed, I am rather surprised at myself for imposing this grisly tale on you. I suppose it was the thought of old Billy, and how we used to yarn about everything on earth, including you, that made me do it."

"Oh—poor Bill!"

The young widow's lips drooped becomingly for an instant, but it was plain that her greater sympathy lay in the living, yet doomed, man opposite.

The engine whistled, and the train began to slow up.

"Stockley—this is where I get out," said David. "Perhaps I may see you again, some time?"

"But I am getting out here, too."

"You are?"

"Are you one of the house party at Old Ways?" she asked, "and—is Enid Westmore 'the girl'?"

His discomfited silence answered her.

"I am going there, too," she said quietly.

Adela Montrose looked directly at him. As for David, he felt a vague, indefinable sense of alarm.

CHAPTER II.

"FEAR OF DEATH MAKES COWARDS."

ADRIAN WESTMORE usually did things on a lavish scale, but this week-end's party was comparatively small. There were only half a dozen guests, and the intimacy of the dinner table, with its flowers and mellow lights, the soft laughter of the women, the sparkle of iced champagne, and the cheerful buzz of conversation combined to bring home forcibly to David the peculiar isolation in which he stood.

At the head sat Adrian Westmore, always somewhat a skeleton at his own feasts as regarded appearance, a lean, sallow-faced man with sardonic eyes and lips; silent, observing, and as parsimonious of direct opinion as a Scotsman. His particular guest was Sir Lionel Hurst, the voluble and always-smiling Jewish banker. The two men were great friends, although they had nothing in common but money affairs.

Hurst was a big man, without being actually stout; black of brow and swarthy of skin, with slightly protruding brown eyes—soft as a spaniel's—heavy lips, and small, plump hands. For a man he smiled too much; for a financier one would say he was far too chatty. He was always ready to give tips, whether on the stock market or a horse race. He liked the society of women, and it was rumored that a certain young actress owed her phenomenal rise on the stage to his generosity. Moreover, he was a bachelor.

David Lennox disliked the banker most cordially for no better reason than that the man was generally to be found at Old Ways, and treated Enid with the familiarity of a favorite uncle.

A married couple, not far removed from the honeymoon stage; Atkinson, the sour and youngish cabinet minister, and Adela Montrose, made up the party.

At the bottom of the table sat Enid, flanked right and left by Atkinson and Hurst. David and she could only look at each other, but the young man did not look often. The pain of parting was already too poignant for him to bear.

What a wonderful girl she was!

Owing to the war she had, as a specimen of young womanhood, burst ready-made upon a world that was quite properly taken by storm, She was tall and willowy, her features, in repose, slightly impertinent, the blue eyes and broad brow reflecting keen intelligence. Hair of softest golden brown brushed and groomed to the fineness of satin; a complexion of cream and palest roses; a head wonderfully set on a slender white throat; long-fingered, slim hands—all bespoke the aristocrat.

She would have made a wife in a million for the sour young cabinet minister, who badly needed such a one to further the interests of his career. Or, had she turned to the left and bestowed the favor upon Sir Lionel Hurst, that too-effusive gentleman would find that he had in a bound

reached the top of the social ladder, up which he was toiling so doggedly.

But, figuratively speaking, she had looked neither to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead, at David Lennox, whom her father regarded as too insignificant even to trouble to banish. They had met six months ago at a dance in London. Within the week they had become engaged, secretly, because it had been Enid's imperious will. To David's objection that it was wrong of him to accept Adrian Westmore's hospitality under such circumstances, the girl had but one reply. Her father had once promised her that he would never place the slightest obstacle in the way of her marrying whom she pleased, so long as the chap was decent. And she knew her own heart.

Whatever plans he might have for her future Enid was convinced that her father would surrender when she judged the time ripe for telling him; but there was nothing to indicate that he had any plans. Naturally, however, he would not wish his daughter to marry an adventurer who looked only to her father's millions.

Possibly it was David's own secret which made it seem to him that that dinner party was different from all other dinner parties. Undoubtedly for him it was. He sat among them a doomed man, making difficult conversation with the bride and being miserably conscious of Adela Montrose's sympathy. Once Mrs. Montrose clasped his hand under the tablecloth. He glanced across and saw Enid looking at him—curiously—perplexity in her eyes—as though she had seen what had happened.

Through the dinner Adrian Westmore gave himself the privilege of his usual long silences, but when dessert came on it was he who introduced a strange and horribly apt topic of conversation. David felt Adela Montrose start, and knew that it was on her lips to cry out a protest, but he checked her with a whispered word.

"I see a fellow's hung himself because a doctor said he only had a year or so to live," Adrian Westmore had announced, apropos of nothing at all, and treading hard upon the tail of one of the banker's wittiest stories.

Dead silence followed the echo of thoughtless laughter. The cabinet minister grumbled. "Well, what of it?"

"Nothing much," their host replied, carefully peeling himself a peach. "Only I've often wondered how the average person would act if faced with something very final."

"Murderers always eat hearty breakfasts before they're hung, don't they?" chirped the bride.

"My dear young lady, the average person is not a murderer," Adrian Westmore said in his best tone of sarcasm. "At least, I hope not."

She was crushed.

"I blame the doctor," Mrs. Montrose said quickly. "How could he possibly know? It—is wicked!"

"After all, death isn't the worst thing that can happen to a man. Good Lord, we've all got to die! It's the fear of death that turns men into cowards."

"You give me the shiverths," lisped Sir Lionel.

"I think the doctor did exactly right," Enid's cool young voice floated down the table. "He probably didn't realize he was dealing with a poor, mad fool—"

"My dear, it would be a part of his business to know," objected her father.

"Well, after all, what does it matter? A year more or less, and the man would be dead, anyway," she replied carelessly.

"In that case, the whole world might as well hang itself at once and get it over with," Atkinson said.

"Oh, no! I don't mean that. I believe"—Enid paused—"in the survival of the fit."

"You're the healthy," murmured Sir Lionel.

"I haven't any patience with people who aren't," she said. "It means that they've sinned."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Atkinson.

"Or their forefathers have—which in its way amounts to the same thing."

"Oh, come now, Enid," ventured the bridegroom, who was an old friend of hers, "you're too bally sweeping. What about the war? That left a few unfits, didn't it?"

"I never approved of the war," Enid

said quietly, "it was the greatest sin of all and posterity will pay the penalty."

"Shades of Young Oxford and New Thought!" exclaimed the cabinet minister. "You boys and girls talk a lot, but I'm blessed if half of you know what you're saying."

Enid laughed her cool, impertinent laugh, and looked at David Lennox for sympathy.

"What do you say to it all, David? Won't you stand up for 'Young Oxford'?—whatever Mr. Atkinson means by that. The last refuge of middle age is to hurl gibes at the young."

This itself was a gibe, for certainly the cabinet minister did not enjoy being called middle-aged. He made a wry face, which was intended for a smile.

"I'm afraid I don't quite get the drift of it," David replied. "If you mean, should a doctor tell, or having told, should his victim hang himself—then I'd say that nobody could possibly answer that question truthfully unless he—or she—stood in the shoes of the doomed person. It would be a matter for personal experience."

"Snubbed!" exclaimed Enid.

"The only sensible comment I've heard on the subject," said Adrian Westmore.

Incidentally, for the first time, he took notice of the young man whom he believed his daughter regarded merely in the light of a capital dance partner and companion for golf and cross-country rides.

"I don't want to hurry you," Westmore added significantly, "but I'd like my cigar, Enid."

"How delicately you put it," his petted daughter replied. "Come along, girls. Father's so old-fashioned and selfish. He can't bear to see us smoking."

David opened the door for them, and as they trailed out, Enid stood aside to let the other two women pass her.

"As soon as you can, David," she whispered, flashing him such a smile as few men were privileged to receive from her. "I haven't seen you alone yet for a single moment."

He was saved the necessity of replying, for she passed on, not even waiting for a nod, so sure was she of her wish being his wish also.

And only then did the horror of his position come to David in full.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEED OF JEALOUSY.

THAT night David dreaded being with Enid alone.

Enid Westmore was human, and therefore no more perfect than David himself; but he was in no mood for the smooth cynicism she had expounded at table.

As yet he had not reacted from the shock of Sir Ridgeworth Bevans's announcement. There were moments when the thing seemed so unreal as to be farcial, but in between came periods of thought when he knew that those possible six months of life remaining to him must be grasped as an entire problem to be settled in a word. Barring accidents, he was the captain of his own soul for that long, and very likely eternity depended greatly upon whether or not he conducted himself like a gentleman or—a coward.

He was with Enid, on the south terrace, where the warm May night hung scents of lilac in the air and whispered its seductive invitation.

Where in this wilderness of human pain could love find its rightful place for David Lennox?

"David," she said, "father likes you! In the drawing-room now he said—oh, what was it exactly? Just a word for my private ear. He said, 'Now and again, E, you get hold of a young man who isn't two-thirds fool. Lennox isn't more than ten per cent.' Don't laugh, David. He really meant it as a compliment."

David had not laughed. What Adrian Westmore thought of him had never before been of such little consequence.

Enid urged the point.

"If you were to speak to him to-night I do believe he'd listen. We're so tired of waiting, aren't we, David, dear?"

And then he realized that this last week-end—which he had pledged himself would be the crowning joy of all that had gone before and all that he could hope for in the future was not going to turn out as it had promised.

Here, with Enid in the warm dusk, it should have been fairly easy to tell her the truth. That is, as easy as it could ever be. She ought to be told, and because he could not tell her, he felt himself twice as great a coward as the man who had gone away quietly and hanged himself.

" It will be better to wait a little longer—until next week," he said. " Up in town. I haven't behaved awfully well in coming here. It's a sort of false pretense, isn't it?"

" Rubbish! You carry some of your ideas too far. For instance, nothing will induce you to kiss me, or make really proper love at Old Ways. You're ridiculous, David. As though fathers had to be considered to such an extent."

With a quick movement—startling—he gathered her into his arms.

Their lips met.

" I love you, my dearest heart," he whispered. " Never, never forget that. Always remember, whatever happens, that I love you."

" You—frighten me!"

" I didn't mean to, dear." Then his arms slipped from her slender waist.

It was the final caress between them, but only David knew that. She was bright and happy, quivering with the joyful pride of having compelled his surrender. Heretofore at Old Ways he had only given her companionship. Love had been held a prisoner in his eyes—halting on his tongue. In his way he was quite as proud as she, and she understood and respected him for it.

They strolled the length of the terrace, and Enid introduced another note into the conversation.

" I didn't know that you and Adela Montrose were acquainted before," she said.

" We met for the first time to-day in the train." David wondered that she could discuss anything so trivial to his own feelings as Mrs. Montrose. " Her husband was a great pal of mine."

" You met—on the train?"

" Yes, she saw my name on the luggage labels—but before that I'd half recognized her. Poor Billy was always parading her photographs. Her face was very familiar to me before—"

" Before what?"

" Before she asked me if I was David Lennox."

It was the first time that Enid had displayed the slightest symptom of jealousy.

" I think we'll join the others." Enid spoke abruptly. " It's growing chilly."

Half an hour later Sir Lionel Hurst surprised Enid by coming into the library, where she had gone to write a note for her father. Some of the party were playing bridge, but Hurst had withdrawn from the circle, which usually had great fascination for him.

" Hello, Enid!" Hurst dropped comfortably into a big chair. " I want a word with you, my girl."

" Yes?" Enid turned toward him.

" How long ith all thith going on?"

He waved a small, plump hand that flashed a diamond.

" Really, Sir Lionel, what do you mean?"

" Thith love affair of yourth with the handthome boy."

Enid flushed. Her blue eyes rested with an expression of distaste upon her father's old friend and colleague.

" You fancy you're very clever, don't you?" Then she added: " I suppose you mean David Lennox?"

" He'th a nith boy. It'th a pity he ain't got a dollar to hith name," mused the banker. " A girl like you would find it deuthed hard to be poor."

" Oh, be quiet!" Enid exclaimed rudely. " You don't know anything about me—or about David, either. And I shall never be poor."

Sir Lionel heaved himself out of the very comfortable chair, and hurled his cigar benevolently to the flames.

" Now don't be croth with me, Enid. Look here, I'm going to athk you to marry me. I don't think you could do better. I've got a title and all that. Jutht a little hint. Nexth time, it 'll be a peerage."

Enid's laugh would have insulted most men, but it did not disturb Sir Lionel Hurst.

" All right—but think it over, my girl. You might change your mind. You never know."

Enid looked at Hurst mockingly. " I'll tell you," she said, " if I change my mind."

David and Mrs. Montrose had been sitting together in a corner of the great living hall, which was one of the particular features of Old Ways. In bygone days when the house was a priory, the living hall had been the monks' dining room. It was vast, with narrow mullioned windows set high up. Faded banners hung against the gray stone walls. Horns and heads of wild beasts had been added by a Westmore who was a mighty hunter; and a minstrels' gallery, by an earlier Westmore whose tastes ran in another direction. There were portraits and great cupboards of oak, gilded Italian marriage chests, and rugs of Persia strewn upon the paved floor. The whole history of the Westmores was distributed in this great apartment, blended by age and loving use into a harmonious whole.

Adela Montrose, dressed in white, her superb neck and arms bare, leaned forward, clasping her hands about her knees. With her blue-black hair and the virginal simplicity of her robe, she resembled a pagan priestess.

David had turned to her instinctively. He was half afraid of Enid to-night, and wholly afraid of himself. With Adela Montrose he could be natural.

"And," she asked again, "what are you going to do?"

A little impatiently he wondered why it seemed to be so necessary that he should "do" something.

"I shall write to Enid," he said. "I can tell her better in a letter."

"You aren't willing that she should be given the chance to sacrifice herself?"

"Oh, no!"

"Perhaps," Adela Montrose murmured, "she wouldn't. I wonder if you realize, Mr. Lennox, that in some respects Enid is—well, rather a curious sort of a girl?"

David stared for a moment full at Adela Montrose. He was trying to think—to think of what he would write to Enid. And after the letter had been written—what then? There was a little, week-end cottage in Devon that Billy and he had set up in happier days—days before Billy had died—before David himself had been condemned to die. The cottage was called Hearts' Haven. Perhaps he would go down to Hearts' Haven and just rest—*rest!* The word jeered tauntingly in his brain. He arose and abruptly left the room.

The echo of a little laugh followed after him from Adela.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JILT.

IT had been raining, but now the skies had cleared, and Enid Westmore—only that morning come up to town—waited impatiently for her summons to David to be answered in person.

The old-fashioned house in Bedford Square was seldom used in these days, for Adrian Westmore lived in the country as much as possible. When business called him to London, however, there was always a small suite of rooms kept ready for him here, since he disliked putting up at his club or at a hotel. Enid's social life in town had been looked after by one or another of her dead mother's numerous relations.

She, too, preferred Old Ways to Bedford Square, but on this occasion she had followed her father to London for a double reason. One was that his health—never any too good—seemed to require her daughterly attention.

The second reason had to do with David Lennox.

Enid was young, and full of the ardor and impatience of youth. It had been nearly a week since she last had heard from David, and then he had merely written a conventional letter thanking her for his Whitsun holiday. At the end of it he had mentioned that he was very busy, owing to the aforesaid holiday. It was not like David to keep silent so long, and now she remembered a subtle alteration in him at Old Ways. It puzzled her.

She had filled the little morning room with flowers brought from the country, ordered tea and put on a wine-colored frock which David specially admired.

There was no longer any sense in waiting to ask her father's sanction to their formal engagement. She had sounded the old gentleman thoroughly these past few days, and, out of his great affection, Adrian West-

more had given her to understand that he would never interpose a breath between her and her happiness.

Cynical as he appeared to the outside world, Adrian Westmore was the soul of sweetness where his daughter was concerned, and many people would have been surprised to have known the depth of feeling and true understanding that existed between them.

Yet he had had his reservations. Only recently had one of them broken down in all completeness. Before Enid it was his wife who had been his idol. Death took her from him when Enid was a mere baby. He had never spoken freely of her to the girl. Yesterday that reserve had vanished. It had happened when she was cautiously questioning him as to what he would do if she fell in love with a worthy young man who could not give her such mellowed wonders as Old Ways and unlimited money for clothes.

Then he had told her how there had been a bad moment when, owing to the dishonesty of a trustee, his own future threatened to be very different from what it had become, and how her mother—although advised and even threatened by relatives—had married him out of hand, merely because she loved him. They had married with bankruptcy staring him in the face, and she with the promise of being cut off from her family.

"It's only the man and the woman who matter to themselves," Adrian had said. "And it's a great pity people in our class don't see it more clearly. You call me old-fashioned, my dear, but in that respect I'm not behind the times. Tell your sweetheart to come and have a talk with me."

Enid had not meant to betray the fact that there actually was a sweetheart. She had stated the case hypothetically and had been seen through.

So there was no longer any reason for delay, but at this very moment David was delaying. It was very nearly six o'clock.

Enid was standing at the window looking out upon the rain-drenched slip of back garden, when her father's valet came in, binging a letter that had come by special messenger.

She opened it.

The thin sheets of note paper shook in her hands. Her sight grew dim. It was impossible to believe that what David had written was penned by him.

> My dearest Enid:
>
> I've been trying to write this letter ever since I left Old Ways. I've torn up twenty. But this has got to go, because you'll be expecting me, and I can't come to you.
>
> Enid, I'm not good enough for you. That's the humiliating truth. You made a great mistake in being so kind to me. It gave me ideas I had no right to cherish. From my heart I apologize for taking advantage of your goodness. If you will still be kind, then forget that we ever met and dreamed the impossible. Honestly, I scarcely know what I am saying. Or, really, if I am doing right when I put it like this. Perhaps I ought to tell you why, but you will find out quite soon enough.

Heavy double lines were drawn through the last sentence, but Enid was able to decipher it. After writing it, David realized that it was unfair to create even a slight mystery about himself. He had only one job, and that was to be brutally direct. He must jilt her. And trust to her proud temperament to rescue her. It was the only way. So the letter continued, growing incoherent under the emotions of the writer:

> Don't think me an utter cad, Enid. I'm trying with every atom of my soul not to be one. I don't know quite what to do. Things rush up at me out of the dark, as one might say. I'm tempted horribly, but—

And the letter stopped, without even a finish to that last sentence—without a signature.

Enid stood for a moment perfectly inactive. It seemed so strange that she should have brought up all those flowers, from Old Ways, with only David in her mind, and put on a frock that he had admired.

She crushed the sheets of paper in her hands.

Jilted!

A vision of Adela Montrose swept through her brain. Adela was more beautiful than Enid. Hers was a beauty that could be defined, while Enid's was peculiarly indefinable.

No—surely not another woman, not even

Adela. Perhaps a late-flowering humility that made it seem impossible for him to marry the rich man's daughter.

Enid crushed the letter into the bosom of her dress and flew up to her rooms, where she demanded a coat and hat of her maid. Down again, she ordered a taxi.

She would go to David and find out what he meant by it.

Such a dearth of servants in this house! It was Storey, the valet, who had to get the cab, and he attempted to demur.

"Are you going out, miss?"

"I am."

"Very good, miss."

She descended the steps slowly. A newsboy crying the evening papers clattered along.

"Late extry—arl about the Westmore crash."

She caught sight of the contents bill the boy was carrying.

MILLIONAIRE GOES BANKRUPT

"Paper, miss?"

All at once Enid was conscious of a dozen different things—of her own maid's frightened face in the doorway behind her; of Storey on the running board of the taxicab he had captured, and motioning the newspaper boy to be off; of the driver's piercing interest in her, and finally of Sir Lionel Hurst's huge motor car bowling around the corner from the opposite direction, the banker himself lolling at ease with a fat cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, and a white flower in his button hole.

"Yes, a paper, please," Enid said to the boy, whose quick instinct sensed something out of the usual.

She handed him a shilling, and without waiting for the change, motioned Storey to send the cab away, and reëntered the house as Sir Lionel's car drew up.

The banker jumped out before his car had fairly stopped. Enid had not waited to speak to him, and he nodded significantly in the direction of her retreating figure.

"Hath anybody told her?" he demanded of the valet.

"No, sir. It was the paper lad—he happened to call it out just as Miss Westmore was coming down the steps.

"Whereth your mathter?"

"Indeed, sir, I wish I knew," Storey replied earnestly. "I rang up the office, but they said he left at four. Is—is this dreadful news true, Sir Lionel?"

"'Fraid it ith," murmured the banker as he went into the house.

In the morning room, which she had made beautiful for David's coming, Enid read the headlines which proclaimed her father not only to be a bankrupt, but a very questionable one, at that. There were to be "investigations." His honor was at stake.

"Lies!" The tears streamed down her cheeks. "Why did no one help him? His friends!—David!—ah—"

This was the explanation of David's letter!

He had jilted her because he knew that her father was—*a ruined man!*

Storey entered timidly.

"Sir Lionel would very much like to see you a moment, miss."

Enid raised her head proudly. This so-called friend of her father's—what did he want of her?

"Show Sir Lionel in," she said briefly.

At least, it would be something to tell him what she thought of him.

CHAPTER V.

SIR LIONEL WINS.

ENID made an unforgettable picture as she stood in the bay window of the little morning room, proud, rather white of face, the rich hue of her wine-colored frock repeated in the masses of wall flowers she had brought up from Old Ways to make the place beautiful for David.

And now, for her, there would never be any David. He had jilted her because her father was ruined.

Sir Lionel Hurst was a man to appreciate such a picture as Enid presented. He was something of a connoisseur in women as well as in horses, and "thoroughbred" was a word which fell often from his lips. The tall, strikingly intelligent girl, with her clear, soft skin and silky hair, her piquant insolence and candid eyes appealed to all

that was best and worst in him. Heretofore she had been well-nigh unattainable, and now he felt that she was within his grasp. It was the great moment in his life. He was not one to betray exultation on the eve of victory.

"Look here, my girl," he said earnestly, "I know what's in your mind. You're thinking I could have saved thith crash. Well, I couldn't. Your father never told me a word about it. I'm as shocked as you are."

"I don't believe you." Enid spoke with intense bitterness.

The banker shrugged his shoulders.

"That's not very pretty. Ask your father, if you don't believe me. You'll take his word, won't you? You'll take the word of a gentleman, perhaps—"

"Oh, I'm sorry! I shouldn't have said that," she exclaimed. "I scarcely know what to think. Isn't there any hope for him, Sir Lionel?"

Hurst beamed and ventured to possess himself of one of her hands, which he patted in tender, uncle-fashion.

"Of course there ith!' he replied cheerfully. "That'th what I'm here for."

Suddenly she realized the immense power of this man of money, and it caused a shudder of apprehension to pass over her.

"But the paper says, or rather hints, at 'disgrace,'" she faltered.

"All bunkum, my girl. I know the gang that have engineered the whole thing. They're a set of cutthroats. Your dad ain't a match for 'em. They fought him with loaded gloves, and he didn't know it—"

"It looks to me as though you knew more than you pretend."

"Sure, I know—now."

"You will help him? You'll get him out of it?"

"If he'll let me," Hurst evaded.

"But you'll make him let you?"

"I can try." He hesitated a few seconds, then met her eyes boldly. "Your father's tho proud," he said. "Jutht like you."

"But I'm not proud where he's concerned. I must go to him. Where is he? Why isn't he here?" She was filled with sudden alarm for her father's safety.

Vividly there came back to her the conversation at the dinner table a week ago when Adrian Westmore himself had introduced the subject of a doomed man's right to hang himself. He must have known then that he, too, was doomed.

"Steady on," Hurst said, gripping her arm. "It's all right. The old man ain't a coward. He's thoroughbred! What about you and me coming to an understanding? You know what I mean. You aren't in too deep with that young Lennox, are you? Adrian 'll let me help him if you and me—well, you know what I asked you last week. I'm still here, my girl—still asking."

The mention of David's name sent a flame over her face. She was being dragged from deep unto deep of humility.

"I was engaged to marry David Lennox," she said. "He broke it off—this afternoon."

Hurst's eyebrows lifted.

"Well, I wouldn't have thought it," he murmured. "Of course, I knew there was something between you. I guess you don't think much of him now, eh?"

"It doesn't matter what I think. I shall probably never see him again."

"That's a pity. And you tho fond of him, too!"

"I tell you I was engaged to marry him," the girl said sharply. "Fond!" She laughed. "Are you fond of me, Sir Lionel?"

"Dreadfully."

"Oh, very well, then. If you can pull my father out of this terrible hole—"

"Now you're talking! It'th a bargain, then?"

"Yes—on that condition. Can you do it?"

"If I don't, or can't, you won't marry me. You're the only thing I want in thith whole world." Then he added quietly: "I think you may depend upon me."

Enid shivered. She stared at Sir Lionel Hurst blankly—seeing a stranger in the familiar figure which had come and gone at Old Ways since she was the merest child. He wanted to *marry* her—wanted to marry a girl that he had fed with chocolates and presented with costly dolls.

Unspeakable!

She stood staring in that blank way while he snapped open his watch, his shining eyes lowered, and informed her that she must excuse him, as he had his job to do.

" Don't worry. Jutht have faith in me," he said consolingly.

She was not in the least prepared to be taken into his arms and kissed before he finally left her.

Trembling, she sank down into a chair and rubbed the scarlet spot on her cheek his lips had pressed.

" David!" she sobbed.

Then she pulled herself together, and the old proud look came into her eyes. There was no use in calling upon David. It was finished—all that. And from the ashes of its dead romance another existence was to come.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF THE PAST.

SIR LIONEL HURST went out of the stricken house in Bedford Square feeling like a conqueror who has crowned all former triumphs.

Giving a direction to his chauffeur he got into the big car, and it was not long before he found himself set down before the most expensive block of flats in London, not a stone's throw from Park Lane. The lift took him to the third floor, and here he was admitted by a young man servant to the drawing-room of Miss Olive Gilder, a woman who at one time had earned a rather precarious living on the stage, but who discovered that running private gaming rooms paid much better from every point of view.

The young man servant said he would fetch his mistress. He seemed to know without query that Miss Gilder would see Sir Lionel Hurst, and presently she trailed in, wraithlike, hard of face, golden-haired, and—angry.

" You!" she exclaimed. " Of all people! And look at the mess we're in!"

" Yes—me!" Sir Lionel agreed. " Ith Westmore here?"

" Asleep on a couch in the dining room. I gave him one of my powders."

" Glad to hear it. He needs a bit of a retht. May I use your telephone?"

Miss Gilder made an indifferent gesture which her visitor took for acquiescence, for he went immediately into an adjoining room, a so-called library, since it contained books as well as the telephone, and carefully closed the door behind him.

Miss Gilder did not stir. She was tired and looked it. She sat listlessly in a great brocaded chair, resting her chin on her hand. She had been a good looking woman, and still retained traces of prettiness, but her youth had begun to fade and fatigue brought out harsh lines in her carefully massaged face. She had huddled herself into a costly garment—half dressing gown, half cloak—of ermine and blue velvet. From between the folds there showed a glimpse of embroidered *crêpe de chine* petticoat. On her feet were blue Morocco sandals, with straps over the instep.

The room was like a hothouse, heavy with flower scents and superheated. It was furnished with a certain amount of good taste, but the luxury, like the steam heat, was oppressive.

" Who were you telephoning to?" the woman asked as Hurst rejoined her.

" To Miss Westmore," he replied briefly.

" Did you tell her Westmore was here?"

" Certainly not. I told her he wath with me, and that we'd be busy for thome time going into matters. Now tell me how it happened. What hold have you got over Westmore?"

Olive Gilder smiled, and looked down at the toes of her sandals.

" It isn't exactly a hold," she said quietly. " I am not a blackmailer, although, as you know, I've been pretty severely blackmailed myself lately."

" That affair of Lord Pelwyn?" Hurst suggested.

" Yes—the miserable scoundrel! And I asked Adrian Westmore to help me. It took thousands to settle. I never expected to see the end of it. And on top of that—well, I don't see how you can be interested in my troubles."

" I'm not—it's Westmore I'm interested in," the banker said, nipping the end of a cigar and lighting it. " You see, I'm going

to marry hith daughter. I want to know where you come in. Westmore's not a gambler—he's not one to run after women, either. What's the mystery?"

"There is no mystery, or very little. I happen to be Adrian's wife, that's all."

Sir Lionel Hurst was not a man to be startled easily, but now his eyes looked dangerously like popping out of his head. He got up and stood over her, shouting in his excitement.

"Are you mad, woman? I knew Mrs. Westmore—she's been dead for years—"

"Don't be a fool—and don't talk so loud," Olive said crisply. "Did you never hear of widowers remarrying? Adrian and I were married ten years ago. We met at Nice, were married there, and—parted there. In all, we lived together about three months. And then I—well, I dare say, I disillusioned him. He was dull company, and I simply went back to the old life, which, after all, was my life. He wouldn't divorce me—didn't want a scandal. All because of that girl, you understand. And now there would have been a scandal if he hadn't come to my aid. The thing would have gone into the courts. Pelwyn's people were all prepared for it, and Adrian helped me out rather than let it be known that I was his wife."

"You're a bright beauty!" Hurst exclaimed. "And Westmore mutht be a bit of a fool. Look here, you've got to clear out of London—out of England, understand?"

"How clever you are," the woman said languidly. "I'm already packed. As far as this flat is concerned, the game is as dead as mutton. I was that near to being arrested." She held up a beringed hand, thumb pressed to the tip of her forefinger. "And I'm not altogether ungrateful. I've been trying to coax Adrian to come with me. I've got enough jewelry to keep the both of us for a year or so. Only he's anxious about that daughter of his."

"Look here," the banker said earnestly. "You leave Westmore alone. You don't want to be bothered with him."

"You're right, I don't," she admitted with a sigh.

"Well, then—clear off, that's a good girl. I'll settle four or five thousand income on you, and give Adrian the money to pay back what he's borrowed to help you out. That's fair enough."

"Good Heavens, you must be rich!" Olive exclaimed.

He shook his head.

"I won't be tho rich when all thith is over. Who does the flat belong to?"

"Me."

"And the furniture?"

"Yes, it's all mine. Adrian didn't even know I was in London until a couple of months ago. I should never have bothered him if I hadn't been in such a hole about the Pelwyn affair."

"Well, I take over your lease and the furniture," Hurst said. "I've been looking for a nith place, and thith is jutht right for me. What about your passport?"

"I had that put in order last week when things were looking really dangerous."

"Then you can catch the nine o'clock boat train to-night and we'll arrange terms later. I'll send my solicitor over to thee you when you get settled. You want to get out of London jutht as quick as you can. Then I can handle everything."

"I suppose I must trust you," the woman said. "I hope you won't cheat me over the furniture. It cost a furious penny."

"Gad, that'th a nith way to talk! You know, you're not out of trouble yet, if you stay here. If Westmore's left to stew in the hell's brew you made for him, there'll be questions asked about the woman he borrowed for, and up will come the Pelwyn affair. Oh, no, you're not out of it yet, my dear. And likely as not, Westmore 'll blow hith brains out. You should have heard him talking about it last week at Old Ways. Oh, yes, he'll kill himself all right, and do it here in thith flat, I wouldn't be surprised."

Hurst had won his point. She was out of the place in less than two hours, and when Adrian Westmore came to his senses he found himself enjoying the hospitality of his old friend, Sir Lionel Hurst.

Already Hurst had been on the telephone half a dozen times. His chief secretary had been summoned, also Westmore's solicitors. The banker himself wrote a statement

for the press, which he signed with his own powerful name.

He denied that Adrian Westmore had gone bankrupt and challenged severely the thinly veiled assertions that this recent financial transaction might be open to question.

CHAPTER VII.

IN SEARCH OF SYMPATHY.

DAVID LENNOX knew nothing of all this; that is to say, he did not know even what the general public knew, for the newspapers had lost all interest for him.

Writing that letter to Enid had taken every ounce of courage out of him for the time being, and he was like a man already dead.

A madness to get away somewhere surged through his tired brain, and he thought much of the little cottage in Devon which Billy Montrose and he had shared for holidays before the war, and before Billy had married. It stood at the edge of a softly wooded cliff overlooking the sea. The two young men had bought the cottage jointly, but David held the title deeds, and it only just occurred to him that something was owing to Billy's widow on that score. Morally, if not legally, she was entitled to the use of Hearts' Haven, or to half of its worth in money.

Before leaving Old Ways she had slipped her London address into his hand and asked him to come and see her whenever he "felt blue."

Well, he was feeling blue enough this evening in all conscience.

Mrs. Montrose had a tiny flat in one of the big blocks of mansions in Maida Vale. She opened the door to him herself when he appeared about eight o'clock.

The flat, though small, was spotlessly clean and most attractive. She was just getting her supper, she said, leading the way to a box of a dining room, where the table was laid and an omelet sizzled in a chafing dish. There was also an asparagus salad, a wing and breast of cold chicken, and some delicious-looking cream cheese with red current bar-le-duc jelly. At the edge of the hearth stood a decanter of claret. Places had been laid for two.

"It's simply splendid, your turning up like this," Mrs. Montrose exclaimed, her dark eyes glowing softly. "I was expecting my sister, but have given her up now. Don't tell me you've dined!"

And then David realized that he hadn't touched a mouthful of food since breakfast and that, in spite of everything, he was very hungry.

He allowed Billy's widow to wait upon him and consumed more than his fair share of the omelet. Meanwhile, Adela Montrose was diverting in her own peculiar way.

She was very poor, she said—one of the famous "new poor." She did most of her housework herself, and sometimes it was very lonely, but her sister came now and again. She hadn't realized at first quite how much she was going to miss poor Billy. She had thought of going on the stage, or into the "movies." People had often suggested that she had a face which would "screen" well. What did David, as Billy's friend, advise?

Then, of course, they came inevitably to David's sad fate. Shrewdly the beautiful dark woman realized that he knew nothing of what the newspapers had told that evening.

Yes, he had broken with Enid. He wanted to go away somewhere, and he broached the subject of the cottage in Devon, which really half belonged to Mrs. Montrose.

Adela's eyes brightened and she was about to speak when the door bell rang.

With a murmured "Excuse me just a moment," she went to answer it.

Tiptoeing into the tiny hall, Adela made sure that the waiting figure behind the ground glass panel was that of a woman before she opened the door.

"Olive!" she exclaimed softly—then laid a cautious finger to her lips. "Come in here. I'd given you up. What's happened? Are you going away?"

She opened a door leading to her little sitting room and pushed the other woman in.

"An old friend of Billy's is having supper with me," she explained.

The sisters were in striking contrast to

each other as regarded coloring, but there was a marked resemblance in the outlines of their features. Olive was considerably older than Adela. She threw back her veil and unfastened her long traveling coat, but did not sit down.

"I can only stay a minute," she said hurriedly. "I'm off to the Continent."

"Is it as bad as that?" Mrs. Montrose exclaimed.

"No, it's all right, in fact. Lionel Hurst is squaring up everything. He's paying me to clear off. He is going to marry Adrian's daughter."

Adela Montrose checked a cry of astonishment.

"Look here, Adela, can you come with me? Or follow me in a few days' time? It's going to be beastly lonely. I shall have to lay low for months. I'll pay your expenses, of course."

"Oh, thanks, very much, but I think not," Mrs. Montrose replied with a touch of bitterness. "When things were going well with you, what thought did you ever give to me? I was good enough to be your spy, to cultivate a very scanty acquaintance I had with Enid Westmore, and get myself invited to Old Ways, so I could give you reports about her father. Here and there you flung me a few of your old clothes that weren't worth selling, and a ten-pound note for expenses, but all the time you were living on the fat of the land and not really caring at all about me."

"I don't think you understand the sort of life I was leading," Olive Gilder said slowly. "However, I can't force you to come with me. And as for the old clothes—I'm sending you a trunkful. Cherry has been told to pack them. Here's a hundred pounds. It's all I dare spare at the moment."

Adela's fingers closed greedily over the crisp notes, and she kissed her sister and apologized.

"It doesn't matter," Oliver said wearily. "Good-by. I'll send you my address."

Back in the dining room once more, Adela found her guest with his elbows on the table, his head resting in his hands.

She touched his hair gently.

"I'm going to call you 'David,'" she said. "Look here, David, you and I are rather sad people, aren't we? I think Billy would be glad if he knew you'd come to me for consolation. I haven't a living soul that matters, now. My sister is going abroad for a long time. May I come with you to Hearts' Haven? There's a farm cottage close by where either one of us could sleep—to avoid stupid gossip. But I could look after you—see that you had proper food and your socks mended. Would you mind very much if I came?"

"It's too much to expect," he said huskily. "Why should you make such a sacrifice for me?"

"Because you were Billy's friend. Besides—it isn't a sacrifice. I'm as lonely and miserable as you are."

She rested a hand on one of his.

"Shall we go tomorrow?" she urged.

The touch of her hand burned into him.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUSPICION.

"A BARGAIN'S a bargain, and I've kept my part of it. Here's the seal. Pretty, eh? Don't it jutht sparkle? Coth me a cool five hundred, it did."

Sir Lionel Hurst had taken a three-stone diamond ring from its nest of white velvet, and slipping it over the tip of his forefinger, waggled it back and forth with solemn admiration.

"The betht is none too good for you," he lisped, transferring his gaze from the stones to Enid.

It was the morning of the next day and so quick and sure had Hurst's aid come to Adrian Westmore that the crisis was already over. Adrian, himself, lay ill in the flat which still nominally belonged to that strange and secret wife of his, the woman who had so very nearly ruined him, and whom Sir Lionel had packed off to the Continent.

Indeed, it is doubtful if Enid's father quite comprehended all that was done for him. He was in a thoroughly dazed and broken condition, and could do no more than merely assent to Sir Lionel's helpful suggestions. Enid had been assured that her father's trouble was that which many

rich men have suffered, namely, unlucky speculations. He would be pulled together in no time.

"Pooh!" said the banker, "I couldn't count how often I've been on the brink of the prethepith. And look at me now!"

Enid found it difficult to look at him without shrinking. Yet, as he said, a bargain is a bargain. She was too thoroughbred to try to get out of her share of it; too proud to acknowledge even to herself that her heart was broken utterly and forever.

She let him put the heavy ring on her finger and suffered him to kiss her hand afterward, while a strange wild look dwelt in her eyes.

"You are very kind—very good, Lionel," she murmured. "I wonder how I can thank you for all you've done."

It would be caddish for her not to express some gratitude, but, oh, why must he take his "pound of flesh"—the poor, shrinking flesh that was so unwilling to be taken?

"You needn't thank me," he replied cheerfully. "It's all in the family, my dear, or soon will be. When are you going to make me the happiest man in the world, eh?"

She fought back an inclination to cry out when he caught and kissed her.

"I don't know," she replied, choking a little. "So much depends on father—"

"Oh, that's all bunkum. Adrian'll come along now like a houth afire. Put on your hat and I'll take you around to him. He's only tired out, not really theedy."

Enid obeyed without argument. It was a great relief to spend five minutes in her own room—anything to get away from Lionel Hurst. And she was going to spend the whole of her life with the man!

When she came downstairs again he was waiting for her in the hall, and they went out together in his car.

On the way to Park Lane he explained that he had only recently taken this new furnished flat. "Got it off a friend of mine who went broke," he said.

Enid was not specially interested, but it soon became plain to her that the banker had had her in mind when he took the place. He must have been determined for some time back that she should marry him. Naturally, she did not know that he had only taken it yesterday, and on the spur of the moment. It would have surprised her still more had she known that her own father was legally responsible for that luxurious flat.

They had put Adrian Westmore in what had been his wife's bedroom, but the discreet maid, acting under Sir Lionel's instructions, had removed all personal trace of her former mistress. She could not, however, obliterate the fact that it was a woman's room. Waxen-faced Adrian had never looked so out of place.

Enid saw him for a few minutes when the doctor was announced, and she wandered forlornly into the adjoining boudoir, suffering from a sense of acute depression.

The gorgeous place made her intensely nervous. Beyond the boudoir was a large apartment that had somewhat the appearance of a dining-room, except that couches and easy chairs were ranged along the walls, interspersed with several buffets, on each of which stood arrays of decanters, siphons, glasses, and boxes of cigars and cigarettes. The thick velvet carpet was covered with wine stains and the curtains gave forth a musty odor of stale tobacco fumes.

The girl was inexperienced in such things, but it came to her that this room had been used for card-playing on a large and dubious scale.

She left it, going into the hall, and there was the discreet maid in whispered coloquy with a woman. The two of them turned sharply when Enid appeared, and the girl recognized her friend, Adela Montrose.

Their surprise was mutual, but Mrs. Montrose collected herself first.

"Enid! How curious, finding you here. Do you live here? I thought—" She gazed about with a little air of helplessness.

"No; this is Sir Lionel's flat," Enid replied. "Do you want to see him?"

Mrs. Montrose had every reason to be evasive.

"Well, I'd better explain," she said, with a quick, warning glance at the maid. "My sister has just given up a flat in this build-

ing, and I thought it was this one. She's gone away, and said she would be sending me a trunkful of clothes and things. I'm going away myself this afternoon. I came around to fetch the trunk to save bother."

"Don't you know?" Enid asked the maid.

The woman coughed.

"Yes, miss. I'll tell James to get the trunk. It's already packed," she replied.

Enid had never heard Mrs. Montrose mention a sister who lived in Park Lane, but after all it was none of her business.

As for Adela, she covered her embarrassment by pouncing on Enid's ring.

"You're engaged!" she cried. "I can make one guess—

"And what about that dear boy I met at Old Ways—Billy's friend? Somehow I felt you were in love with each other."

A wave of color suffused Enid's cheeks. It hurt more to have Adela Montrose deal this chance blow than everything else which had gone before. And was it really a chance blow? Adela's manner was furitve, excited, uneasy. One might almost call it guilty.

Enid's pride forbade her to lie. She tried to meet her friend's glance, but Adela's eyes were wavering.

"David discovered that he didn't want to marry me," she said. "He found it out last night when father's failure was announced."

"Oh, how shameful!" Adela cried in mock indignation. "I shouldn't have dreamed he was like that. Well, you're better rid of him; and certainly Lionel Hurst is madly in love with you. Oh, here comes my trunk. Good-by, dear. I'm so glad to have seen you, if only for a few moments. I'm going away for the summer, down to a little hut in Devon that poor Billy left me, to rest and economize. Good-by!"

Enid allowed herself to be kissed, but she did not return the embrace. Instinct told her that it had a Judaslike quality. She was frightened of herself, however, for harboring such ungenerous thoughts.

Why should Adela Montrose be glad that there was nothing between her and David? Why had she been so nervous and evasive? Was it because of the trunk left for her by the mysterious sister she had never mentioned before? Undoubtedly that had contributed to the queerness of her manner. It might be, too, that she felt uncomfortable on Enid's account, taking into consideration all the newspaper gossip about poor Adrian Westmore.

Yet Enid felt that it was really neither of these two things.

Her mind went back to the dinner that night at Old Ways. Once she had been very nearly certain that Adela and David had clasped hands under the table. Only it was manifestly absurd. They had met for the first time that afternoon. David had explained their quickly matured friendship on a perfectly rational basis—Billy Montrose had been his best friend.

Then Enid remembered, too, how once when David and she were laughing over their possible poverty if her father refused to consent to their marriage, and they took matters into their own hands, David had said that at best they would have a roof over them. He told her all about the cottage in Devon which had been bought jointly by him and his friend, whom she now knew was Billy Montrose. The name of the cottage was Hearts' Haven. This must be the "hut" that Adela meant.

"No—no—no!" her tortured heart cried furiously.

Yet, after all, what did it matter? David had jilted her heartlessly just when she needed him most. He hadn't even waited to find out if the newspapers knew what they were talking about. There had been something peculiarly indecent in the haste with which he had sent that letter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BITTER TRUTH.

SIR LIONEL bustled into the drawing-room presently, whither Enid had betaken herself after Adela's departure. He began to assure her that her father was indeed all right, only the doctor said he must remain quiet and rest. It was quite unnecessary, in the banker's opinion, to inform Enid just now that a lesion in the brain was feared.

She was relieved at what seemed to be good news, and turned the conversation by telling him about Mrs. Montrose calling for a trunk, and the maid evidently expecting her, or not surprised that she had come.

Hurst whistled softly between his teeth. The maid may not have been surprised, but he was. He thought he knew Olive Gilder fairly well, but the past twenty-four hours had opened his eyes to the fact that he did not know her at all. She had kept her secrets, and obviously her sister was one of them.

"Did you take this flat from Adela's sister?" Enid asked.

"I took it from a—a woman," he replied. "I didn't know she was related to Mrs. Montrose."

"Isn't she a nice woman?" Enid asked in the blunt way for which she was famous.

"Now, that's a pretty question for a child like you to put," Hurst said indulgently.

"It looks to me as though she had been running a gambling den," Enid said.

"You're tho clever!"

"And what had father to do with her?"

The quickness of this took him fairly off his feet, and he jumped. After all, he was at heart a kind man, and he did not want Enid to be hurt by unpleasant truths.

"Your f-father!" he stuttered. "Ask me another."

Enid pointed to a framed photograph on a table, where it looked as though it had been standing for the greater part of its life.

"That's a picture father had taken at Nice ages ago. I remember particularly, because it was my first term at boarding school, and I was so terribly homesick that I cried myself sick over a copy he sent me. He seemed so far away. I felt, somehow, that I'd lost him forever. But he came back and took me to Old Ways, and I had governesses after that. He said I should never be sent to school again. I remember how changed he was, too—so grave and ill-looking. Going away hadn't done him a bit of good."

Before Hurst knew what she was about to do, she swooped down upon the photograph to examine it and the frame more minutely.

"This is French workmanship," she asserted positively, "and down in the corner he's written something—wait a minute—'To Cara Mia, January, 1919.'"

Hurst took the thing away from her.

"Well, what of it?" he demanded boldly. "Your father hasn't spent all hith life in jail, has he?"

"I suppose this is what the papers meant when they hinted about 'investigations.' This would be the disgrace that threatened. He speculated or borrowed or did something he shouldn't to give money to that woman, whoever she is. I've more reason to be grateful to you than I realized."

"You're too clever!" Sir Lionel stormed. "Dashed if I like it! One of these days you'll be finding a photograph of me in thome lady's drawing-room, and there'll be the deuth to pay."

Enid tried to smile, but all the impudence, which was her greatest attraction, had gone out of her face.

Never before had the grim things of life touched her, although, being a modern girl, she knew that they existed. But it was difficult to realize that shadows could cloud her own horizon.

Hurst had ordered lunch to be prepared, and Enid and he ate it together on a bridge table in the drawing-room. Enid briefly explained her aversion for the dining room, and her lover agreed with her. He would have the whole place done over, he said, once he was fairly established. Indeed, Enid should do it to suit herself.

With a valiant effort the girl succeeded in avoiding sinister topics, and did her best to banish David Lennox from her mind. She owed it to Lionel to meet his cheeriness halfway.

It was really a delicious lunch. Olive Gilder had employed a chef who understood his job thoroughly, and he was anxious to sustain his reputation with so well-known a gourmet as Sir Lionel Hurst.

The banker ate ravenously, smacking his lips over the good things that he disposed of in rapid succession. But all the time his mind dwelt uneasily on something quite apart from food, and he made various sug-

gestions to Enid as to how she should spend the afternoon.

They had nearly finished the meal when the doorbell rang, and Hurst jumped to his feet, still holding his napkin. He appeared to be listening intently. Enid also listened, but for what in particular she had not the least idea.

And then the drawing-room door opened, and the butler ushered in a small, gnome-like man, with a great domed head, eagle eyes, and a mouth that suggested clamped iron. His glance darted from Enid to Sir Lionel Hurst and back again, and then he demanded irritably:

" Well, well—where's the patient? Where is Dr. Corden? Why is my time being wasted like this?"

There came another ring at the doorbell, and, laying his napkin on the table, Hurst said:

" That must be the doctor now. Are you Sir Ridgeworth Bevans?"

" I am. Who is this young lady?"

" Oh, excuse me—" In something of a flutter, Hurst introduced the famous specialist to Enid.

The girl clasped her hands together and spoke appealingly.

" Is my father worse? Are you going to have a consultation? Why wasn't I told? All the time I thought it wasn't anything serious, and now—"

Sir Ridgeworth looked at her with much the same critical air that he would have favored a specimen on the dissecting table.

" I was asked to come here for a consultation," he said briefly.

But Dr. Corden, who came in at that moment, was very kind to her and more explicit. They hadn't wanted to alarm her, and Sir Lionel had done right not to say anything about it. Dr. Corden, a genial, fatherly man who had known Enid most of her life, patted her shoulder and bade her get Sir Lionel for a drive. There was nothing she could do. Two nurses had come, and they would attend to everything.

" Is there going to be an operation?" she faltered.

" Possibly. It depends on what Sir Ridgeworth thinks."

" Now?" Her voice was low and trembling.

" Possibly."

" May I go in and speak to my father a moment?"

The little specialist with the big head glared at her.

" Certainly not. On no account is he to be excited," he said.

" But, Sir Ridgeworth, I won't say anything to excite him—"

She broke off suddenly, feeling as though she had been struck in the face. He would not let her go in—that was plain. She clenched her hands together, hating him.

Little did she realize that it was really this same fierce and clever little man who had taken David from her by that cruel sentence of death. Had she known, she would have hated him even more.

The fussy French clock on the mantel said half past four. It seemed to Enid that a lifetime had passed, but now it was all over.

Sir Ridgeworth Bevans had gone, taking his assistant with him, but Dr. Corden still remained. He had spoken to Enid, but his manner was not so reassuring as it had been when he first arrived. Almost immediately he had disappeared again and closeted himself in the so-called library with Hurst.

Enid felt suffocated. Half mad with apprehension and the long, long period of inactivity, she was worn to the breaking-point. She had lost David. Was she to lose her father as well? Was she, who had accounted herself the happiest girl in all England, to have no shred of joy left? What had she done to deserve such cruel punishment? Her lips quivered like a child's.

Down below lay the park, all fresh with the tender new green of spring. It was pretty, but not like Old Ways, for which she longed with homesick intensity. But Old Ways wouldn't be her home much longer, nor even the dear old-fashioned house in Bedford Square. As Lady Hurst she would enter into a new existence altogether.

One of the nurses came in and told her

that her father was now sleeping comfortably, and the immediate danger was over. Dr. Corden thought it advisable for her to go out and get some air. The nurse would accompany her if she liked, having quite a lot of errands to do.

But Enid preferred to go alone. She was too fatigued to drag around to the chemist's and other shops. She thought she would sit in the park for a while. Everybody seemed very happy. Even the beggars were cheerful. It must be that spring had caught them all up in her own gay mood.

The lovely, grave-faced girl in a chair under a tree watched them with sad and wondering eyes—the miracle of the babies in their smart prams, the frisking dogs, the old woman who sold red and blue balloons, the children with their balls and dolls, and the young folks courting. Only the happiest people in London had come to the park, and Enid felt herself to be an interloper.

She was too restless to stay very long, and scarcely half an hour had passed before she started back again, filled with fear of what might have happened during her absence.

Crossing the street blindly, she was pulled back by the hand of a policeman. There had been a temporary block in the traffic, but now it moved on. The mud guard of a taxicab laden with luggage had narrowly grazed her skirt, and her dazed eyes rested dully on the alarmed faces of the two occupants. Then the cab slipped through, and the policeman relaxed his clutch on Enid's arm. She tottered and all but fell.

David Lennox and Adela Montrose had been the occupants of *that cab!*

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

THE WONDER RIVER

ONE night, one crystal night of many nights,
I rode upon the bus down Riverside,
Past the slow wonder of the Hudson, where
The ships lay still, with steady-riding lights
Reflected in the silent water. There
I saw the shallow, white-lit ferries glide,
With phosphorescence trailing overside,
And I was silent, gazing, but ahead
In front of me, a dark-browed, swarthy man
Broke into Yiddish, and across the aisle
A man slid into rapid Spanish, while
We lumbered past. A young Italian girl
Spoke smoothly; like cool rain upon smooth stones
Her soft voice rippled on. I wondered then
If they were saying all the things that I
Was feeling; things I could not even try
With my slow western speech to compass yet—
About the Hudson tangled in its net
Of wet-meshed silver.

Violet McDougal.

What You Don't Know Won't Hurt You

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN

Author of "The Woman Who Knew," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

"QUE *cosa?*" Dan Gordon asked in good business college Spanish through the open window of the flivver taxi as it skidded to a stop, almost touching the rear bumper of one of the jam of cars blocking the way. "What is this—another *fiesta?*"

He wondered when the people worked; but did not let it worry him. The *fiestas* had not kept him from getting things all fixed with Gubernador Vencedor, of Daragete, the most influential governor in Variguay. They would not keep him, the day after to-morrow, from his audience with Presidente Blanco, who was on his way to visit the province. And—not counting chickens ahead of time or anything—yet—

About Tuesday he was going to sail down the river with the concessions in his pocket for that little oil field of Daragete, so exactly fitted to the needs of the Adamant Asphalt Company that—he'd know in another two weeks what they'd do for the up-and-coming young man who had got it so neatly. And then—he'd trot down to Indianapolis and find out whether what they'd done looked good to Miss Josephine Dugan, and how he looked himself to her, in his brand new position.

"*Es el Presidente Blanco,*" his chauffeur informed him.

"What! What's that? *Que cosa? El Presidente?*" Dan was interested now. He had to yell above the rattle of the ancient motor in the old cab. "But—but—" Dan got back to Spanish eventually, to remind

the *cochero* that the president was not due until day after to-morrow.

"He has arrived unexpectedly ahead of time," he finally made out of the driver's Spanish. It is simply terrible, the way a tiptop conversational knowledge of perfect Castilian leaves you wondering what they're really saying in Spanish as spoken everywhere but in Castile.

"*Gee whizz!* I'm going to have a look at him." Dan jerked the catch open and let himself out of the car in haste. The bands and the rest of the racket had already got by.

It struck Dan as a great opportunity, this, of seeing his excellency ahead of time. He believed, like most young men, that he could tell a lot about a man by his face. He certainly couldn't plan an interview in advance by the faces they gave the president in the two papers of Daragete, one of which violently opposed everything he did, while the other seemed to use holy pictures of saints for his portraits.

A slight rattle made him look back as he landed on the concrete of the street. He had knocked down his dinky little camera, with which he was always intending to make pictures. He picked it up and turned the little handle of the film spool, on the chance that he had exposed the third film in dropping it. Not that he had the slightest intention of taking the picture of the *presidente* from the sidewalk of the Calle Grande on a two-inch square. He knew that it would make Señor Blanco's face look like a dot. But he suspected that, should he delay too long, his driver might decide the camera was worth his fare and run off with it.

He dashed down through the mess of waiting motors and carriages toward the curb of the great street of the town, a third of a block from where his taxi had been stopped.

The line-up was thin, considering the importance of the arrival. *El presidente* had come too far out of schedule. Only three deep was the crowd right here at the corner.

"Has he gone—*es pasado ya?*" Dan spoke to a roughly dressed mulatto directly in front of his own right shoulder. He had barely noticed that, as he had come to the curb, the other side of him was blocked by a daintily clad young woman.

Both wheeled toward him at once. He could not have startled them more by grasping their shoulders and telling them they were under arrest. The man and the girl stared at him as if he were a ghost.

One look at the girl made Dan Gordon forget to look again at the man. One week in Daragete had convinced him that Variguayan women were tremendously overrated. But this one! A minute ago he'd have held against all comers that the world did not hold a more beautiful young woman than Josephine Dugan. Josephine had eyes like the sky by moonlight, cheeks like the soft pink of a smooth peach, hair like the night with the moon left out, lips like—well, Dan was in love with Josephine.

But this girl! He couldn't believe they grew like her. Her hair was a dancing mass of black curls. Her eyes were big coals.

"*Que quere?*" the man was asking him.

"*Pardon—dispensa Usted,*" Dan faltered. "I but wished to see the *presidente.* Has he gone?"

He wasn't sure whether he said it intelligibly or not. The girl turned her face back toward the automobiles in the line of parade, almost as suddenly as she had turned it on Gordon.

"*Cosa tiene Usted*—what do you want with the president?" gruffly demanded the man. Dan did not attempt to answer so rude a question. If they didn't like him there he could move. He had shifted about two steps when he saw that the *presidente* had not gone yet—since he was coming now.

Dan stopped where he was for the look he wanted. It disappointed him a little. The *presidente* was of darker hue than Dan had expected; though he was getting accustomed to find men of all sorts of mixed breeds in high places. Further, the *presidente's* face seemed to reflect more of the cruel violence of his coming to power than of the able statesmanship generally attributed to him in his rule. There was no mistaking him—he looked enough like his pictures to be identifiable, and he was riding in somber black regalia, on horseback, beside the governor, with whom Dan had already had two successful interviews.

Then there was some slight commotion on the sidewalk just where Dan had left it a second ago, almost within his arm's reach yet. Out of it a small, black oblong object hurtled into the air to fall directly under the *presidente's* mount.

Dan—probably several hundred others—wondered what it might be as it fell. Their wonder was instantly answered by a rending crash, like that of a too-close bolt of thunder, a flash of flame, a puff of yellow smoke, ugly, sickening bits of débris in it—two men and two horses blown to pieces, a sick fraction of a second of dead silence, tinkle and crash of windows high overhead, then screams.

Whatever explosive the bomb contained had been one of those up-and-down blasts that expand themselves vertically. The crowd on the sidewalk was not jolted from its feet; even the lower windows stood the shock. But pandemonium took the place of the ordered cheering which had, a second before, been hailing a nation's ruler. Almost everybody seemed seized with the impulse to rush back into the street out of which Gordon had just come. A few guards in the parade, a few of the sidewalk police, a few of the bystanders—dashed toward the center of the tragedy. Some stood stock still. And Dan, conscious of being an outsider, remained one of these, his gaze frozen in horror to the charnel pit the clearing smoke began to show in the middle of the street.

Then, as the crowd milled around and away from her, the girl he had already noticed stood almost beside him. He did not know it until she reeled toward him, her hands outspread to clutch at him for support.

"Oh—help me!" she whispered in a frenzy of horror.

He seized her in his arms and saved her from falling. As he supported her weight he became conscious of the fact of the little camera in his hand—his left, toward which she had swayed, and which was now at her side. Then the thing was wrenched from his grasp and fell under the feet of the throng still pressing toward the corner from the middle of the block. He caught the sound of the slight, crackling pop as a heel must have come down on it. It was the last thought he gave it. Some of the soldiers seemed to be running amuck, sure they must do something, but entirely without idea what to do. Here and there one was drawing a gun. A shot was fired. Obviously the thing to do with the girl was to get her back to his taxi.

Not very hard to do that. She seemed a fairy wisp in his sturdy arms. The crowd was squirming its way between the drawn-up motors, and mostly ahead. There wasn't enough difficulty about his task to keep him from a thrill of protective tenderness as he saw that her wonderful black eyes had closed.

Little attention did he attract. He was not the only man carrying some fainting woman from the scene. Most of those who were not rushing ahead of him were in the cars, their owners or chauffeurs frantically cranking or working starters, though there was not the slightest prospect of their moving either forward or back for many minutes.

One man looked up from his task. He stared, not quite so much at Dan as at the girl.

"*Por Dios!*" he gasped.

Another man looked down from the seat of a car.

"*Por Dios!—la Señorita Isabel!—*" Dan, caught in a jam for the second, noticed that the speaker choked back his exclamation. At last he reached the taxi. His chauffeur was having difficulty getting the flivver wound up. Gordon probably had that to thank for his still being there; for the cab was close to the rear of the press.

"*Por Dios!*" For the third time came the exclamation at sight of his burden. "*La Señorita Isabella de—*"

Then the chauffeur stopped. He looked hastily about and gave up his cranking to assist Dan forward so violently that it was only by the greatest difficulty the American kept from bumping his burden against the interior of the car.

A grand dame in the motor alongside raised her nasal voice to exclaim:

"*Por Dios!—aquel Americano—el tuve la bomba! Si—*"

The chauffeur had now got the recalci-

trant engine going. Whatever more the woman had to say was lost in its roar. In another second the man was in his seat and the cab was backing out so utterly regardless of what stood in its way that Dan trembled.

"*El tuve la bomba—*" The words echoed themselves out of Dan Gordon's subconscious memory, and startled him from his wonder at the face of the girl beside him, as he supported her against the swaying of the wildly driven cab.

Surely that woman had not said those words. They meant, "He had the bomb!" But what then had she said? His mind began a vain search for Spanish words which might have sounded like the ones his brain was repeating for him.

But that could wait. There was something more pressing to be attended to just now.

"*Al hospital!*" cried Gordon. The girl's eyes were still closed; he couldn't think of any other place than a hospital to which to drive her. This he knew was in the opposite direction to that they were now taking along the river.

But the chauffeur seemed to have his own ideas, and gave no heed whatever to commands. And the girl's eyes opened at Dan Gordon's words.

"No—no!" she cried. "Not the hospital—take me home! Please, take me home!"

He suddenly realized that she had spoken to him in English.

"Oh, never mind," she abruptly altered her decision. Dan felt her studying his face so tensely that he lost countenance under her gaze, and dropped his eyes. A moment before she had been a pleading child, afraid of a hospital; instantly she had become an expert, trying to make out what he was thinking.

She leaned forward and shot the single word, "*Izquierdo,*" at the chauffeur. It seemed to Dan that the man had already applied brakes to slacken for the turn. They went halfway up a hill between high walls. She brought to her face a brave little smile.

"You must come in and let my guardian thank you. I think I should have fallen and been trampled to death down there."

The chauffeur had stopped the car unbidden, was at its side and had the door open with the tremendous swiftness of movement he had displayed since the tragedy. Dan leaped to the bare apology for a sidewalk before the bare door in the wall. He helped the girl out. The cab driver had already begun to ring the bell of the house.

The girl drew a silken handbag from somewhere up her sleeve. From it she took a rather startlingly large roll of paper money, which she pressed into the chauffeur's hands.

"Sigue," she bade him, "go on!" What she said next Dan worried into English that meant: "What you don't know—what you forget—won't hurt you." And she added: "*Bueno!* Forget that you have seen me."

The chauffeur turned back to his car. As he started to close the door he paused.

"*Señor!*" he addressed Dan in sudden perturbation. "*La caja?*"

Gordon knew the word meant box. But he had had no box.

"The little black one," the man explained further. The adjectives were too familiar for Dan to miss. And he recalled:

"Oh, *mi camera!*" And he tried to state that it had been smashed in the crowd.

But the girl's voice cut in on the explanation sharply to the driver. "Sigue!" And he left a stream of smoke and a feeling with Dan Gordon that he saw some sinister meaning in the idea of that box having been a photographic instrument.

"Come in, Mr.—" the girl began.

"Gordon," he supplied absently. The old negro who had opened the door was bowing obsequiously. With a word, the girl took the servant's arm and leaned wearily upon it as they went up a stair, arriving in a splendid salon.

The divan upon which she dropped was of massive grandeur, ebony inlaid with mother of pearl in strange designs. Even the Palacio de Gubierno was not so splendidly palatial. The room might have graced an art gallery as an exhibit of old Moorish work.

"So you lost a camera?" the girl began as she dismissed the servant with orders to call Tio Juan and bring some refresh-

ments. It seemed a query made as a conversational filler, based on his last words with his chauffeur. "Too bad you didn't get a picture of the explosion—of the man who did it?"

Cameras seemed to interest her. Out of them she contrived to mention that she had spent five years in an American convent school. She was quite familiar with American cameras. Dan began to feel that she was trying to find out more about that camera than he knew himself. It seemed to him there was some interest in the subject she was not revealing. Then just as he became conscious of this feeling she had got off the topic, never to return to it.

Meanwhile the black servant had brought cake and wine and word that Tio Juan had gone out in response to a telephone call a few moments since. Dan Gordon realized that his part called for eating and running, to leave the girl to retire to rest.

And then—he stayed an hour and a half. It was an hour and a half he would never forget. It mixed more emotions than he had ever felt, provided him with more guesses than his whole previous life.

At one moment he was sure she had become deeply enamored of him; at the next he was exercising a clean man's self-control with the sense of protecting her from utter infatuation too sudden to be wholesome. It was harder for him to resist her in other periods when she seemed to hark back to the horror of the afternoon, and became a terrified child whom he ached to caress back to calm and happiness. And then—

At times he felt as if he were in physical danger; as if she were playing some subtle, terrible game with him, holding him against his own will, for some sinister purpose that sent his eyes in sidelong glances about the room to see if some one were hiding, awaiting her signal to spring upon and slay him.

But it was in a still different moment that he finally rose to go, got his hat, and actually started for the top of the stairs. He had convinced himself that the girl was really afraid of him; that she kept him there in eagerness to betray him into some proof of her fears. And into his mind crept back the memory that she had been as startled as the man beside her at a perfectly commonplace inquiry addressed to him from behind less than a minute before the bomb had been hurled.

All the while that memory had troubled him. Nothing but their mutual fright could connect the pair in his mind. But the bomb had flown from so nearly exactly the spot he had left hardly two yards behind him that he could not get over the notion that he had startled her, not by his question itself, but by speaking at all to one in the very instant of preparation for a desperate deed.

And this fear of the girl's—it had shown through her manner a dozen times in that hour and a half—gave him the creeps. It was an intolerable thought that she should have been accessory to such a crime. His mind suggested it against his will or wish—that she feared he knew too much. And he wanted to get away from the disquiet of it.

Tio Juan arrived at the moment of his apparent success in making his departure—he had to wait for the man's coming up the stair, accompanied by a mulatto whom Dan took for a servant.

Dan had but opportunity to observe the younger man's color. There was good light in the lower entrance with the door open. But it closed before more was revealed. The two men got halfway up the stairs. Dan could but feel that they looked up at him, as was to be expected. The servant suddenly stopped short, wheeled, and went hurriedly down the steps again. Dan could hear, but not see, him passing along a readily supposable hall at the side of the stairs below, into whatever the ground floor of the house might be like.

Had he spoken? Had he said what Dan thought he had said in a startled whisper: *"El Americano!"*

It was just another of the baffling experiences of the hideous afternoon. Right then nothing relieved it from hideousness in Dan's mind. He felt that, with a perfect mastery of the language, he might be able to know what was going on. As it was, he was entirely at sea. Besides, he had fancied in the whisper—if it was not fancy in itself—that tone which reminded him of the dowager-empress-looking lady with the lorgnette and—

"*El tuve la bomba!*" came back to him in the last words he had heard that woman speak—or thought she had spoken.

It had seemed too absurd then for belief. He had almost put it out of his memory as one of his many errors in catching the language he had thought he understood so well while he talked with the *gubernador* and with a few others who spoke it to him as he tried to speak it to them. Even they had left him guessing when they talked to each other.

Now the words had gained force. They mixed with the unpleasant feelings which had got him started from the house. He suddenly wondered if the girl had been trying to pry from him some admission of a share in the dastardly assassination.

Then Tio Juan provided a bunch of fresh puzzles. Dan had expected a real uncle of the girl with whom he had tarried too long. The man who reached the top of the stairs was at least an octoroon, if not closer negro mixture than that. There is always the possibility of the Moorish strain in all southern Spaniards. But it does not kink the hair into such proximity to wool mat as Tio Juan would have had with hair but a little longer than was left by the close clipping he affected. Obviously the "*Tio*" was but the "Uncle" Southerners sometimes apply to more or less elderly negroes.

And yet nobody could have behaved differently had the man owned the establishment. The girl got up to introduce them. He held out his hand with the dignity of a grand señor. He was plainly too upset over the tragedy for prolonged talk of anything else; but his was the shocked attitude of one great man fresh from the violent death scene of another his equal.

He talked his Spanish, however, like the *gubernador,* as soon as the girl had made clear the reason for Gordon's presence in the place. He insisted upon further chat with the American, more extended opportunity to show gratitude for the girl's rescue.

Dan did not like him. During the first moments of their talk he knew why he did not like him. If his complexion had been white and his hair straight, it would have been a privilege thus to make his acquaintance. Had he been in the Palacio de Gubierno, or at the capital as President of Variguay, Gordon could have discounted his own Anglo-Saxon prejudice against color and admired him as very obviously a man of substance. It was the fact that the girl seemed to consider him capable of fulfilling her wish to have her rescuer thanked by the guardian she had mentioned at the door which spoiled Tio Juan for Gordon.

She stayed with them. It seemed that she could not tear herself away from the information it appeared her guardian had got concerning the assassination. And this promptly became of a nature to hold Dan Gordon's interest.

The police were all at sea. A thousand rumors were abroad. The one Tio Juan had been combating, wherever he had found it in authority, connected the deed with the alleged hostility of the United States of America—

"It has been kept alive for years by European interests," the big man explained —"this notion that you Americans want to gobble us up. The best of the people know better. But every revolutionary party makes capital of it and decries North America and all attempts of North Americans to do business here. Variguay has been more revolutionary than some other countries, and gets more of the foolish anti-Yankee propaganda. Now—what earthly reason could the American government have for sending a man here to kill Blanco?"

"Good Lord!" Dan gasped in amazement at so insane a notion.

"Yet, that is the thing they are saying. Several witnesses claim to have seen an American—a man who looked American, anyway—leap from a taxicab, picking up the bomb as he left it, pausing a moment to adjust it, then rush along the Calle San Roco between the motors and carriages, toward the Calle Grande, exactly in time for the explosion."

And Dan Gordon gasped again. Not aloud this time.

"He was heard to ask anxiously if the *presidente* had passed yet—something must have delayed him to get him there so close to the moment, they have decided. Nobody seems to have noticed him again until he

was returning. He was carrying, instead of the bomb—a girl."

Apparently nothing but pure mischief shone in the man's face at the sudden laugh which came from Isabella's lips.

"It is you—your camera—and I," she cried. The idea amused her immensely. Tio Juan joined in the mirth.

"Exactly," he said. "I had already heard that it was you, Isabel. I rather expected to find the American here. If you'll excuse me, I'll go now and give the laugh by telephone to our able Señor Prefecto de Policia. It may save you the embarrassment of arrest, *señor.*"

Dan gulped in relief. For a minute the thing had not looked funny to him.

"You are safe now," said Tio Juan a few moments later. "I suppose, however, that your plans for the oil concessions will be considerably upset. Permit me to place at your disposal any influence I may be able to exert with whatever new administration is established."

Dan thanked his host cordially. He almost began to like the man. Just for an instant his own head had been held over a pit, and he had forgotten his disquietude over others' affairs. He was promptly brought back to them.

"It is a pity," Tio Juan averred, "that neither of you, as close as you were, saw the actual hurling of the bomb. The crowd —bah! Besides the American rumor, there are ten descriptions of the assassin, varying a foot in height, making him both fat and lean, white and black—and all shades between. Either of you might have given a real description—you have some intelligence."

The man and the girl were both watching Dan Gordon. He had been on the brink of mentioning the strange action of the mulatto laborer who had been so startled at his approach and inquiry. He had checked the words—he must have made the girl very uncomfortable with them.

And they knew he had checked them.

"You saw nothing, Isabel?"

The girl shook her head.

"Nor you, *señor?*"

She had not taken her eyes from Dan Gordon's face.

"I saw nothing," he spoke hastily.

There was an awkward pause. Then the man shrugged his shoulders and gave vent to a very slight laugh.

"Well, what you don't know won't hurt you." He used almost exactly the same words Isabel had to Dan's chauffeur, merely changing the forms to suit the superior dignity of the person addressed. "If you have already forgotten some things, you display wisdom. It has been a sad part of our too excitable nation's history that in our revolutions knowledge has caused more deaths than guilt."

And in Tio Juan's eyes Dan did some reading. He knew he was being warned. To offset the impression a new bottle of very old wine was opened.

"A toast to your safety, your success, your health, and many years," the old man proposed. Over her glass Isabel sent him a glance of such dazzling friendliness that he felt intoxicated before the first taste had passed his lips.

Already, with the order for the wine, Tio Juan had bidden the servant call a taxi to take the Señor Gordon to his hotel. A pause in the talk had reminded the American that he must have overstayed his welcome. The cab was at the door as the toast was finished.

A warm pressure of the girl's hand kept Dan's head a little giddy, his pulse some beats too rapid, until her guardian had seen him safely into the waiting car, and the driver, having come from the river road, drove on up the steep narrow street and made two or three turns through others like it.

The taxi driver had taken his directions from Tio Juan in such rapid flow of the Variguayan variation of Spanish that Dan could make nothing of them.

He suddenly recalled that not once in the introductions, not once in the conversation, had he been given the name of his host or of the girl. He had already lost his bearings since leaving the house. He had been thinking of everything but his bearings as he approached it, and could have told no more than that he had turned from the Avenida del Rio up a side street between walls somewhere, then through sev-

eral blocks of side streets between walls to the west of the Calle Grande.

He was exactly as ignorant of the name or abode of the powerful friend who might protect him from trouble and aid him in his business, as ignorant of the identity of the beautiful girl whose memory still dazzled him—as if he had never met them at all.

But he could ask his chauffeur who they were. Then he checked himself. It seemed too absurd to request from a taxi driver the name of a man from whom he had just parted before the driver's eyes in a manner to indicate almost intimate friendship.

Then he shut off another inspiration—to have himself driven back on pretext of having left something behind. Into his mind had crept the certainty that he was being force-fed a bit of the philosophy that what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him. Names had been deliberately omitted, and the omission covered up so cleverly he had missed noting it. He wouldn't find them out now.

The chauffeur seemed eager to be rid of his fare, moving with unwonted alacrity in getting the door open. Dan let him go. A newsboy rushed up with a single sheet of paper—the Variguayan idea of a special extra. *La Liberdad,* the opponent of Blanco's rule in all the man had ever done, was in half-inch bands of mourning over his demise.

Its headlines proclaimed the death of the two greatest soldiers and statesmen Variguay had ever produced. They went right on and assured the reader that the deed was an act of Yankee perfidy. The United States was seeking a cause of war. It would find it in the prosecution of the assassin, whom it would hold innocent of his deed.

Just how he had done the terrible thing was described in a whole column. It contained no news for the man it accused, save in the apparent police bluff at the end, where it was asserted that the diabolical American had escaped to the wild hills near the border, but that soldiers were so close upon his trail his capture was assured. Then came the real shock—in another column of this special sheet.

The cabinet of the murdered president had accompanied him to Daragete. It had met immediately after the assassination. The country had been placed under martial law. Señor Juan Xarto had been appointed dictator. His nephew, Pedro Aldroguez, had been made *generalissimo.*

Dan Gordon knw very little of Variguay history. He knew enough, however, to recall that Juan Xarto had been the last general to capitulate to the forces of Blanco, who had executed his predecessor, Sancho Aldroguez, and driven Pedro Aldroguez into hiding or exile. It was obvious that a distinct change of hands had taken place in the government of the little country. One needed to know more than Dan could guess of its politics to comprehend why Blanco's cabinet should have chosen Xarto as dictator, with the practical certainty that he would get himself elected president. That wasn't worrying Gordon so much as the fact that the new dictator's name was Juan.

He had hardly begun to puzzle over the questions thus started, when he was able to obtain an answer to them. The clerk of Daragete's best *posada* called him to the telephone. A woman's voice asked if he were Mr. Gordon.

"This is Isabel, Mr. Gordon," it said the instant he had admitted his identity. "Uncle Juan and I have been reading the special sheet of *La Liberdad.* It is playing rather hard on that anti-American bit of foolishness. It really has quite an influence. Uncle Juan thinks it might be better for you to get away from the country for a little while until things settle down. You're in no danger of arrest—that is settled. But you might be in some peril of unpleasant encounters and even injuries at the hands of some of our more fanatical patriots. Things are pretty much in confusion now, you know. If you want to get away, we'll have a car at the hotel in ten minutes, the chauffeur instructed where to take you, and a boat ready to put you over the Rio Azul when you get there."

Another warning! Dan Gordon's wrath rose at the idea of running away. Personal danger had never driven him from his place yet. A little of his feeling went into

the query: "Why—do you particularly want me to clear out?"

The girl hesitated before making her reply: "Of course, only for your own safety's sake. Why should I want you to go otherwise?"

"I didn't know," he answered. "I hardly think I'll run away." It was then he bethought himself to find out about several things in one—

"You're Miss Aldroguez, aren't you?" he suddenly propounded.

"Miss—Miss Aldroguez!" her voice exclaimed—but not so quickly as he thought it might. "Heavens! No! I wish I were. Why, didn't I really tell you my name? It's—"

There was a click in his receiver. He called half a dozen times. He got the operator—a slow enough process in Daragete—and demanded to be put back on the wire from which he had been cut off. The operator made hard work of understanding what he wanted. His Spanish went worse than ever in a telephone. He failed to get the connection again. He failed to understand quite why. He would never know whether he had been cut off by some one else, or by the girl herself.

He was puzzling over the directory in search of the name of Juan Xarto for a final try, when a policeman entered with two more officers in his wake. They had drawn automatics in their hands. They told him to raise his. The next moment they were leading him out, handcuffed. An ancient, horse-drawn police wagon stood waiting for him outside the hotel.

In ten minutes he was safely lodged in a room under the Palacio de Gubierno. A door led into a passage by which he had been brought to the room. There were no windows. The door was of solid iron, save for a heavy grating a little too high for him to see through.

"The Dungeon of Despair!" Dan Gordon didn't say it. He was afraid to try out his voice on his own ears. He just thought it as he sat down on the floor. It felt damp and dirty; but there was nothing else to sit on, and the floor was higher than his spirits.

For a few moments his mind seemed as blank and befogged as the inky blackness about him. His predicament was beyond him. He could not believe it; he could not doubt it. He could but feel it as something crushing him.

Then he took hold of himself. He wasn't going to let this scare the wits out of him. He would be calm about the thing. First of all, he pinched himself hard enough to have waked him from any nightmare. He got up. With great deliberation he made his way, feeling along the stone walls, to the door. Just a ghost of lamplight showed through the grating above, so that it could be seen on the ceiling of the passage when one got in range of it. Very carefully he felt for the door's latch.

There was none. Not on that side of the door.

He tried, gently at first, to push it open. He tried harder. He stopped. He had the feeling that should he exercise his whole strength on that door, without its giving to his pressure, he would go mad then and there. He was sure enough that he was locked in, that he could not get out. There was no sense in risking that physical strain that would take a little of the mental power he needed to hold himself together.

Then he pushed the door with all his might.

At the same instant he heard a thudding across the passage. He had already noted that both sides of this dungeon hall were lined with cells. The thudding increased in speed and violence.

Suddenly the thuds became accompaniment for a yell. The voice was that of a man; the cry that of an undisciplined child under punishment. And it shook itself with each of the thuds.

"Waow — waow — waow — waow—" it gradually rose in pitch. "Waow—waow—waow—waow—"

The thudding went slower—the cry changed. "Wa-eeeee-oo—wo-eeeeee-oo—" with the thuds on the prolonged "eeeee," which shrilled into the top note of a high voice's falsetto capacity.

Dan's hair rose; he sagged limply against the door.

The thudding and the shriek were taken up by another voice, just at the point in

the hideous melody of madness already reached by the first. A third joined in—a fourth—more—yet more—

With a burst of fury Dan flung himself at his door. He gave every ounce of strength in his body; he shrieked as the others were shrieking. They had gained in speed again; the " eeeee " sound was prolonged, and did not circumflex down again, but was snuffed off for quick breaths that heaved through the passages to break instantly into fresh, " Wa-eeeeeee-e-e-e-e!"

It was utter madness. He knew it lacked a scintilla of rationality. He could not stop it; it seemed as essential as breath seems to a man choking.

" Wa-eeeeeee — waeeeeeee — wa-eeeeeee wa-eeeeeeeee!"

He kept it up until he fell, completely exhausted, shaken, breathless, so weak he thought he was going to die.

But he didn't die. He had just ceased to mind things so acutely. He was not sure it hadn't been a good thing for him. He could lie there and sleep in his exhaustion—and he would not know anything while he slept.

But he couldn't sleep. His mind began to work. Sanely, now, he considered his situation.

Who knew that he was here? Some one must know it—he must have been arrested by somebody's orders. What about Tio Juan? Was he less powerful than he talked; or more powerful, but a liar? Was he Juan Xarto? Was Isabel the daughter of former President Aldroguez? Had she avenged the execution of her father by assassinating the man who had done that? Had that mulatto servant thrown the bomb at her instigation, under her instruction and her very eyes?

If so—they were trying to " frame " him, and they had every promise of success. There was not any reason he could discover why they should attempt the formalities of a trial.

Yes, there were. There could be but one reason for putting him here at all—to make a scapegoat of him. That required some publicity to be of any use. The country must know that the American anarchist had been duly shot for his crime. Then—there was a consul at Variguay City, who might start something if there hadn't been proper formalities of a sort.

All right—he could figure on a few more days of life. And, maybe, after all, Tio Juan was not the present dictator; but would prove a real friend in the end. He would certainly learn soon of the arrest. He had his fingers on things. And Isabel would come to the rescue.

Dan Gordon was too young to stay hopeless long. But there are remedies for too much optimism.

His cell was opened. He was led out and upstairs. Not with anything to make him think he was going free—with handcuffs replaced and the pistol at his back to prevent any such foolish notion.

They took him to a small room. As soon as his eyes could accustom themselves again to the light he saw that it was occupied by soldiers. Officers, rather, seated about a council table. Instantly he surmised a quick court martial and—he took off most of the days of life he had just put to his credit in prospects.

Some one told him to sit down. As he did so, he swept the faces of the group. It was another lesson in his own ignorance. His first impression was one of universal sinisterness. Then he questioned so harsh a judgment—or one so hopeless for himself. He looked them over a second time. Of one face after another he was compelled to admit that all he could really tell about it was that it was foreign. He wondered how he could have imagined it would do him any good to get that look at the *presidente* which had turned out so fateful.

Suddenly he paused. His eye had fallen on a face a little out of the line of the group around the table. The room was none too well lighted, though it had seemed so bright after the dungeon darkness. Some brace of the electric fixture threw a shadow from the middle of the table to its end, up the wall, and to the big shadow of the reflector on the ceiling. The face that stopped Dan Gordon's gaze was in that shadow. At that, the man shaded his eyes with his hand. The back of the hand was of a pale, yellowish brown. The top of the head was woolly. The shaded eyes met Dan's.

The man he had asked if the *presidente* had already passed; the man so singularly perturbed by the simple query! It was that startling look of fear which had marked it then. The eyes dropped, and were covered by the little finger of the shading hand.

And Dan was not so sure. He had really given little enough heed to that face—no more than a glance. The face of the girl had been more interesting, her fear more exciting.

The others still eyed him. No—he could not tell what they thought of him. He waited.

"*Señor!*" It was the man with his face under his hand who spoke. He had cleared his throat rather audibly before he began. Whatever he looked, his voice was not the huskily scared one with which the man at the parade had briefly and gruffly responded to Gordon's query. And he spoke in at least understandable English:

"To-night we wish to ask but the one interrogation. We have analyze the remain of the explosive. You did use what is call with you, TNT. Not is the truth?"

"I didn't use any explosive. You know that as well as I do," Gordon snapped back at him.

"*Io?* I?" His Spanish first personal pronoun was an utter gasp. In English he managed merely a tone of amused surprise. "I could not to know anything but what I hear. You speak Spanish, not?' he inquired.

"Very little," Dan replied guardedly. He realized how much better he could command the conversation in English. The man in the shadow merely gestured toward the one sitting next him. He was a sallow man, almost white, his blood tinged with Indian rather than negro, if it was not purely Spanish. He spoke slowly, distinctly, with a careful Castilian pronunciation that Dan could get very well:

"You took from your taxicab a black box. What was it?"

"A small camera," Dan replied.

"Camera?" the native asked in as much surprise as the word had caused the chauffeur in the afternoon.

"*Máquina fotografica,*" interposed the man in the shadow.

"Ah—the same of which we found the fragments."

"It is possible," Dan explained. "The instrument was knocked from my hand in the crush after the explosion, stepped on and completely broken."

His interviewer smiled cynically. The man was more surprised than Dan by another question from the English-speaking man in the shadow:

"Who knocked it?"

"I certainly do not know," Dan responded with a shrug he had picked up as part of the language, to denote the absurdity with which the query struck him. Then he realized how sharp had been the question, and felt that the eyes under the shading hand had been boring into his face again.

"I suppose"—his other inquisitor spoke very slowly and distinctly—"you certainly do not know that we have established that a small photographic machine was the mold and disguise into which the concrete outer jacket of the bomb was fitted?"

"N-no."

It was then that Dan noticed a strange performance which might have accounted for the sudden, sickening heat he felt. Two soldiers brought into the room a heavy, rough-looking iron chair. They brought it on a hand truck, which the one wheeled, while the other steadied it with his hands heavily padded in rags. There came with it a smell familiar to Dan's childhood on his mother's ironing day. They made hard work of putting the chair upright on the tiled floor.

It was scarcely in place before three more soldiers brought in the most frightened negro Dan had ever seen. His face was an ashy gray, his eyes rolled from side to side, his mouth opened and shut over convulsive efforts to swallow, he shook from head to foot.

"Sit down, Tonio," one of the officers ordered with a grin which seemed to communicate itself to the others.

The negro was led to the chair; he touched it with a finger of one of his manacled hands. He rent the room with a shriek, which was echoed with laughter from the men.

"*Bueno,*" one spoke jocosely, "you may stand, if you can correctly answer our questions. A little closer—so you can sit down quickly if you make a mistake—

"Just make your answers to El Señor Generalissimo there."

The negro faced the man of the shaded eyes. Dan was slowly subsiding from the start he had made to go to the fellow's rescue—a start which brought the chains of the handcuffs sharply back to remind him that he was still bound by them.

"You were at the corner of the Calle Santo Tomas and Calle Grande when the explosion occurred, were you not?"

The negro hesitated, blinking in his effort to study the face of the *generalissimo.*

"*Si, señor,*" he ventured tremulously.

"You saw a man run toward the Calle Grande?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"He had something in his hand?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"You are a professional *fotografista—no es verdad?*"

"*Si, señor.*"

"What did the thing in the hand of the running man look like?"

"*Un máquina fotografica.*"

The man might or might not have been in the crowd. Dan knew he would not have recognized him, anyhow. He told of hearing the runner ask two people if the *presidente* had passed yet, in such a tone that it frightened both, especially the one who happened to be a lady. Mostly, he told it in answer to questions, with the parrotlike, "*Si, señor.*"

"Then, what did the man do with the *máquina fotografica?*"

"He threw it at the horses of the Señor Presidente and the Señor Gubernador. Then—*boom!*"

"*Muy bueno, Tonio;* only remember what you saw, and you will not have to sit down. Take him away.

"And now, *señor*—perhaps you know more than you did. Perhaps you are ready to tell more of what you know." The Spanish-speaking inquisitor turned on Dan Gordon. The words, the tone were the last needed hint to convey to the American exactly how completely he was in their hands. The results at the end would be exactly the same, should he confess or not, that he had hurled the bomb.

"Perhaps," the officer encouraged, "you will tell the whole truth better if you stand where the last witness stood."

It was just the thing to rouse Dan Gordon's obstinacy. He did not know whether he could sit on that chair and stay obstinate or not. He was not going to be bluffed with a mere threat of it.

"Yes," he said. "I will tell the truth—all I saw, all I know, all I did—before that chair, on it, or right here."

And as Dan spoke these words he fixed his eyes straight on the shadowed face of the *generalissimo.*

He had called their bluff. The hand covered the eyes a little more closely. There was a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"There is no necessity to-night. We will not torture him. We have enough witnesses. No—wait. I myself will further examine the prisoner. You, Señor Teniente, and you, Señor Capitán, may remain—the others I excuse."

All got up, salutes were exchanged, ten men clanked out and left three. The door closed behind them.

"Do you speak English at all?" was the *generalissimo's* first query. He addressed it to the men he had retained. They both apologized for total ignorance.

"That is unfortunate. I will, however, translate anything of interest"—and he turned to Gordon:

"I think you see what case we have. That which I have to say is thees:

"I am *generalissimo* of all the armies of Variguay. My uncle is dictator. What we wish, it happens. You understand?"

"You have rather shown me," Dan snapped back at him.

"Vairy good. Which I have which to say is thees: If you will now make confession that you have hurl the bomb and have keel the *presidente* and the *gubernador,* I weel arrange so you shall escape from the country this night."

What Dan said was almost involuntary—the outburst of a strained mind suddenly come upon the certainty of a lot of terrible suspicions.

" So, you did throw the bomb. I thought I recognized you."

" One word of that in Spanish, and you die," rapped out of the paling lips of the *generalissimo*.

" He will not confess—it is enough." He hastily spoke to the two officers he had retained—as Dan now fully understood, because he had been sure they could not speak the language in which the offer of freedom had been made.

" What a man does not know it does not hurt him," the *generalissimo* said again, in English. " You will have yet one opportunity, at the trial. Your lawyer will visit you to-morrow." At a word the soldiers jerked the handcuffs on Dan's wrists; he got up, and was led back to the cell.

Twice during the night the hellish chorus of thuds and shrieks was raised again. Dan Gordon did not join in. He was not asleep. He was thinking. Also, he was listening. He doubted if he would be left alive through the night.

After several ages he heard the long-awaited sound, some one at the door of his cell. He got up, tense, ready for anything. But only the grating was opened. A lump fell through it to the floor. A thick bottle of earthenware showed against the dim-lit ceiling outside. Dan grasped it—it was water.

He found the lump. From its feel and smell he judged that it was very old, very sour bread of some sort. He hurled it into the corner of the cell. He tasted the water gingerly. It was stale—but otherwise only wet. He drank a lot of it. He concluded it must be morning.

Later—Dan had no way of guessing at time—his door was opened again. Again it found him ready for a spring. But he was led out to a cell with some light in it, and introduced to his lawyer. Rather, the lawyer got up and introduced himself, with:

" Hello, old man—you seem to be in a hell of a mess."

He was an American. Heaven knew where they had dug him up. There was to be every pretense of a fair trial—for the benefit of the United States.

" Of course it's a frame-up. We haven't a chance in this little world. I've never practiced law in this country—I've been trying to raise sheep. But I'll do my best before I quit. And I think it will be just nothing at all, so far as helping you is concerned.

" I'll try to find that girl. Sounds to me as if it's the Señorita Aldroguez, all right. Her father was married twice. One wife, I believe, was whiter than the other. I'll try to locate the chauffeur of your taxi—and I'll not succeed.

" We won't have much but cross-examinations to go on. And we'll get shut off the minute we try to work our way into the real facts of this thing. You wouldn't have had much chance if you had confessed. It's an old game to let the prisoner escape and shoot him on the run. Still—

" I think it would have been a better chance than you've got now. I'll try for the girl. May not see you again until to-morrow. Am trying to get the consul here on the job, but it looks as if they've got him out of reach somehow. And they'll excuse that on the ground that a military trial gave them no time to get him here, and that the condition of the country demanded prompt action to restore order. Well—*hasta luego. Adios!*"

Dan Gordon's lawyer returned in triumph twenty-four hours later, and twenty minutes before they were called to the court room in the big palacio. In those twenty-four hours Dan had done absolutely nothing but think and drink some water. He had grown no happier.

" I got her—and she's going to testify in your defense," said Mr. Fandome. " Say—she's some little girl, isn't she? And I rather think she's just a trifle stuck on you. The chance is better than I thought."

It did not stay better. Witness after witness—the scared negro of last night, the grand dame of the motor alongside, Dan's chauffeur, and Heaven knew how many others—had seen him, the prisoner at the bar, hurrying to the very spot whence the bomb was thrown a minute after he arrived there. Quite a number had noted the small black object in his hand. A few had rec-

ognized it as a camera. There were almost as many who declared they had seen him actually throw the object at the *presidente* and the *gubernador.*

Dan hardly heeded them. He had known they were coming, and, with the exception of the taxi driver, had been sure of about what they would say. He but noted that his lawyer was laboring under something of the handicap which always troubled him —a lack of perfect understanding of the language—also a much worse lack of knowledge of the country's law and of his case. He had had no time or chance to find out anything which might discredit one of the witnesses. He was continually stopped in his cross-examination by some objection he did not know how to refute. It would have been hard to find a native lawyer less competent to handle a case in the native courts.

Still, Dan pinned his hopes to his own testimony and to that of the girl. He believed that he could prove he had had every reason to wish the two dead men were still alive. To-day he was to have had the important conversation with the dead *presidente.* He had wished to see the man, solely that he might better know how to approach him for this interview.

He was not permitted to testify. Whether that was Spanish law or not, or Variguayan, or a military rule made for the occasion, it was firmly held by the *coronel* in charge of the proceeding that the defendant's testimony was out of order. Fandome pleaded in vain that only on that testimony could he show the utter lack of motive his client must have had, since the only other able to testify on the subject was the governor who had shared the *presidente's* fate.

Remained only the girl. She shot at Dan one of her loveliest glances as she took her place beside the desk. Mr. Fandome began in his somewhat labored Spanish:

"Your name is—"

"Isabel Maria Dolores Paula Vincente Moro de Valencia y Aldroguez," she said softly.

"You were at the scene of the explosion which killed our late *presidente* and the governor of this province?"

"Yes."

"You were near the spot from which the instrument of death was hurled?"

"Yes."

She was given opportunity to explain her presence there. She had, she said, been walking along the Calle Grande, unaware that there was to be a parade until the crowding people and the sound of music starting at the river told of its approach. She had stopped to see it.

"Did you see the prisoner before the explosion?"

She had seen him. She had also been surprised by his inquiry if the president had already passed. Her surprise, amounting to a little of fear, had come with the notion that a strange foreigner was addressing her.

She also recalled that the man he did address had shown some surprise and resentment. He was a laboring man, to judge by his appearance, apparently of an ill-nature, at least toward foreigners. She could not remember that he had anything in either hand.

"Naturally, you were shocked at what you saw—the explosion, I mean—frightened?"

She had been. She had felt herself fainting as the crowd rushed past her. She had not been so frightened by the foreigner, the prisoner at the bar, but that she had asked him for help.

"Did you notice whether he still had in his hand the object you had taken for a camera?" asked the counsel.

"I cannot recall—I was very weak, dizzy, confused. I do not know whether he had it or not. He told me afterward that it had been broken in the press, as he assisted me to the taxicab. Everything went dark to me for a while. The prisoner here gave an order, as I came to, to take me to the hospital. Instead, I had myself driven to my home."

"You're sure you do not remember seeing that in his hand after the explosion?"

"I cannot remember," she answered.

Dan Gordon would never know whether she told the whole truth or not; he knew she had failed to help his case. The officers serving as what would have been jury-

men in a civil court of law listened impatiently to the lectures of the two lawyers for and against the prisoner. They voted guilty without leaving their seats.

Mr. Fandome put in the pleas usually made in America for a new trial. They were promptly denied. Sentence was pronounced forthwith:

" He will be shot at sunrise. Permission is given for the attendance of a clergyman of whatever faith he professes. No other visitors will be allowed."

He was led from the room. It was all over. He had eighteen hours more to live. They led him past a window whence he could see over most of the city and the broad river beyond. A great wave of homesickness suddenly seized him. He wanted to see his native land once more. He wanted to see—Indianapolis and Josephine Dugan and—

No, he must not get foolish or sentimental. It was all futile, hopeless. His life was at its end. For him, what preparation he could make for what lay the other side of death.

A native *padre* came to visit him in the afternoon—Dan had been reared by his mother in the same faith as that prevailing in Variguay. He made his confession. The *padre* merely inquired if he were not guilty of the crime for which he was to die. He shrugged his shoulders. The church was powerless with the men who ran the state. A century ago he might have done something—not now. He talked consolingly of martyrs.

But this was no martyrdom for faith; it was simply murder to cover the murder already committed by others. Dan was not much comforted. The *padre* promised to return after midnight.

" Have faith in our God—He, too, has suffered injustice unto death. And those who die with Him shall reign with Him."

Dan tried a lot to pray. He tried to pray for heaven. But he wanted earth—wanted the life he had planned and dreamed of two days ago. He had not done his bit in the world, it seemed to him; he was just at the beginning of the things he had thought he would do, the successes he had hoped for. He was not old enough to die. Of course, nobody ever is. Yet, older men can face death more easily than young ones; a few have made their mark, more have realized that they will never make it.

For some reason he had not been returned to the cellar dungeon. He was put into a cell on the ground floor, in a remote corner of the palacio—at the bottom of a round tower. But the window was a narrow one almost at the high ceiling; the door, though it gave directly upon another opening to the park around the building, was without even a grating through which he might see. Perhaps it was put there to make things easier for the priest. The room had an electric light high up in the ceiling. But the switch or button seemed to be outside. Dan could not find it.

Eventually—eternally—the day dragged to its close, and the slit of light above went out. After a while Dan began to pray again.

The door was flung open. The wide hat and the black cassock of the priest showed against the hall light. As the door was closed again the light was turned on.

Dan gasped.

The *padre* had taken off his broad hat. Instead of his short, crisp corona of hair around the blue-gray tonsure, were curls—a wealth of them piled high over the head of Isabel Aldroguez. She suppressed a nervous little laugh.

" Can't you bid me good evening?"

Dan couldn't. He stood and stared and stared.

" Does the *soutane* become me?" she inquired.

But he was in no mood for jests. He swallowed hard, but could not speak yet.

" Very well—I'll take your gaze for admiration. But you must listen well to my counsel. I really think the garment is too large. See—I have a better-fitting one under it."

With a quick movement she had removed the cassock. Sure enough, she still wore a second *soutane*. She fanned herself with the broad hat.

" Put it on, Mr. Gordon," she bade him, holding the black gown out to him. " Then we shall be priest and acolyte. The guard

would not let my acolyte accompany me within. I gave him a bottle of aguardiente and bade him drink it if he would escape dire consequences.

"We have time—the guard expects me to be with you half an hour. By the time we get out he won't know whether he let the acolyte in or not; he won't be able to tell whether we are two priests or what.

"Heavens! You'll have to stoop. I do not believe there's a *padre* in Daragete as tall as you. There—that will do. The outer guard is also drunk. The *muchacho* who came with me had his directions to go on down the hall.

"Listen some more now. I will take you to horses and a rider who will lead you to the border. There you will meet a friend of mine. He has some things to say to you. Don't fail in this. And keep that thing on until you get to the horses; then take it off. Our *padres* don't ride much; they are driven. Our carriage is outside. But—we must wait here a little longer."

There she stood, smiling at him—just a girl. He could not understand it. The depths of secret plotting and intrigue and assassin to which his past days had compelled him to assign her—could they be true?

It struck him that a girl who could stand and smile and jest over the rescue of one condemned to be shot in the morning must be capable of almost anything. He shut the thought out of his mind. She was doing something big and brave for him now; she was exquisitely lovely in her altar-boy's outfit, as she was outwardly in everything she put on. He would rather never know some things about her.

Yet, at the next moment, he felt he must know all about her. She was still smiling at him—finding it a little hard to keep the smile up, but not hard enough for his inexperienced eye to detect the strain. He could not let her go out of his life.

"Aren't you taking a terrible chance in doing this?" he finally managed to ask.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Nothing to worry about," she answered lightly enough.

"Why have you done this—for me?"

Had she told him that she was but repairing in the only way possible under the circumstances the damage she and hers had found it expedient if not necessary to inflict, he would have believed her. She did not. She chose to tease; she smiled back, tossed her head, turned it a little to one side, and whispered:

"Oh, because—"

Had he been eating three square meals apiece for the last two days and carrying out any remotely normal life, he would have done some thinking, and probably would not have seized her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers.

It was obviously a lot more than she had bargained for.

"Stop! Stop!" she hissed. "What do you mean? What are you doing? Stop! Feel that—feel it—"

No invitation shone in her blazing black eyes now. And he felt it—the prick of a knife in his side. Not that, but her look of utter repulsion, shook him back to reason.

"I—I beg your pardon. I—oh, God! I—I—why did you look at me like that?"

Once more she laughed. She tucked the wicked little stiletto back somewhere under the folds of the *soutane*.

"I brought you a little bite to eat." She spoke in the most matter-of-fact of voices. "Your guide has more with the horses. I hardly think you are feeling faint, but—here—"

He ate the tiny sandwiches, to cover his confusion rather than from any appetite for nourishment.

"They're as *Americano* as I could make them," she said.

"They're delicious," he hastily assured her—though he could not have told her whether they were made of chicken or cheese.

"*Bueno*—let's go," she murmured.

The guard outside the door tried to get up to kiss the *padre's* hand, like the good churchmen he was. He sprawled on his face. Outside another guard was sleeping the sleep of the dead drunk. Dan and the girl crossed the park to the street. A small carriage waited. The driver jumped down at their approach, knelt, seized Dan's hand and kissed it.

Then he helped them into the carriage and they drove away. For some moments silence reigned, save for the bump of wheels over ancient cobbled streets. Then they reached a country road.

" Here is where we stop." The girl suddenly broke the silence. The carriage halted.

" Good-by, my friend—I don't know whether you would willingly have played the friend so far or not, but—what we don't know doesn't hurt us, under some circumstances."

" G-good-by," Dan faltered.

She held out her hand—in such fashion that he realized it was permission to kiss it.

" There is your guide—there are the horses. Sigue—*volve a casa,*" she finished, addressing the *cochero.*

Dan stood a moment, gazing after her.

" Thees way, *señor,*" a man's voice spoke from a clump of bushes under which Dan had already descried the horses. " And, permit me to say, we must be silent. Do not ask from me no questions. Eet ees what we think you have know wheech have make much trouble for you. What you do not know will not hurt you."

They rode for an hour and a half. Dan was never quite sure; but he will always believe that his guide was no less a personage than the *generalissimo* of the military government of Variguay. At length they came to a stone hut by a little river. The guide dismounted, approached the door of the hut, knocked loudly. An old man opened it, holding a candle against the wind so that the light fell in his face. Dan gasped once more in astonishment. It was none other than Tio Juan.

He held out his hand. Dan grasped it.

" I am sorry that our parting must be in such inconvenient quarters. Alas, such are the fortunes of revolutions. And we must be hasty, much as I would wish to prolong an interview. I have brought some papers for signing."

He spread them on a crude table. Dan stared at them in about the last bit of astonishment of which he could be capable. He read them—far enough to realize that they conceded to the Adamant Asphalt Company the rental and exclusive use of the lands thereinafter described, for considerations thereinafter prescribed.

" I think you will need to sign here and here." The old man indicated the lines. " So soon as an election is held and I am regularly installed as *presidente,* if you can return to the capital, I will put them in permanent form. It will be quite safe then. Nobody really knows you there. Few in Daragete, for matter of that.

" I tcld you I would use my influence. I am man of my word, so far as eet is possible. Here, also, is the property of yours seized at the hotel. Your horse will ford the river here—a road yonder brings you, in five miles, to a railroad station. That is in Brazil. *Adios*—and many thanks for your great services, as apologies for the troubles you have suffered. I trust you will be able to let us repair them with comforts at another visit."

Dan thought he would, as he crossed the river. Then, with a long breath of sure liberty, he changed his mind about it. He looked back for one last sight of Variguay. What he didn't know—it was a lot. He would never be quite sure that the man who had just conducted him from Daragete was an assassin. Were it so, only revenge had been taken for an execution hardly less a murder—that of former Presidente Aldroguez, the father of Generalissimo Pedro Aldroguez and of Isabel.

And Isabel—he was not sure of anything about her. She was wonderfully beautiful. He wished he were as sure that she was of absolutely white blood. He wiped his lips occasionally. What he did not know would not hurt him.

And he did know that he had won the concessions for his company. That would be a much bigger feather in his cap, now that the revolution had so upset former arrangements. And he could be pretty sure of something pretty nice in the way of a future position.

And—he blushed a little. Josephine Dugan was, after all, the only regular, dependable, lovable, lovely girl in the whole world. And—well—

What she didn't know wouldn't hurt her.

(The end.)

Whispering Sage

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO and JOSEPH NOEL

Mr. Drago is author of "Desert Law."

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

DICK ACKLIN, boss of the Double A, is taking two shares of water from Rebel Creek that cuts across his vast ranch, and needs much more, when Buck Bodine, an unscrupulous stranger that has bought an adjoining ranch, suggests changing the channel in such a way as to give Acklin and himself all of the water. Such a change will ruin all of the ranches in the valley below them, but most of the lower ranchers are Basques and are not supposed to count. In spite of both Acklin's and Bodine's dislike of the "boscos," they are both interested in Mercedes, daughter of José Arrascada, most influential property holder of the lower group. On the day before the creek is to be let into its new channel, Blaze Kildare, a young cowboy, rides across Double A property, is arrested, and makes such a good impression upon Cash Morrow, the foreman, that he is hired at once. Later that day he meets Mercedes and immediately experiences the thrill of first love. At night the creek is dammed, and in the morning Kildare goes to Paradise to spy on the Basques, who are plotting against Acklin. Esteban, son of "Old Ironsides" Arrascada, is their leader. Kildare then carries a note to Bodine; he is admitted cordially, but senses trouble. As he sits opposite his host he suddenly realizes that, behind him, *the window is being slowly opened.*

CHAPTER VIII *(continued).*

"LAW, HELL!"

BLAZE sensed his danger; but no hint of it come into his eyes as they met Bodine's. Quite naturally he turned the talk to the work at hand. The over-intentness with which Bodine heard him convinced Blaze that his imagination was not playing him tricks. And yet he dare not turn around. He knew that if the man at the window was minded to shoot him down in cold blood any movement he made would be sure to bring on the climax. But

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why was he singled out? He had seen enough to make him realize that something moved under the surface here on Webster Creek, but gun-play was more than he had expected.

The shining biscuit tin, acting as a mirror, reflected the troubled face of Bodine. Inspiration came to Blaze. Reaching out, he took the pan and stood it on end as if to shake the crumbs from it; then quickly held it before him and caught on the polished surface the picture of a hat and the lower part of a face. With the barrel of a heavy gun the owner of the hat was pushing the window open. In vain Blaze tried to penetrate the shadow which the hat threw over the man's face, and which concealed his identity.

Bodine was quick to grasp the action. With an oath he kicked his chair behind him and made for the window.

" That damned wind comes out of the cañon every night about this time. Cools your victuals off before you've got time to get them down."

He closed the window with a bang. Had Shorty recognized an enemy in Kildare? When Buck turned he found Blaze was on his feet.

" Going already?" he asked, torn between anger and fear. A break with the Double A now would be a calamity.

" *Adios,* then." Bodine waved his hand as Kildare got into the saddle. He failed to note the tilt of Kildare's jaw.

Blaze forced My Man close to the porch.

" Years ago, 'way up in Montana, Bodine," he warned, " I first heard of the Double A. And since then whenever I've heard cowmen speak of it, there is one thing they have always said: ' The Double A boys stick together.' They have a habit of not forgetting. If one of them turns up missing and is discovered months later lying face down in some lonely little cañon, plugged in the back by a rustler or gunman, they don't wait for the sheriff. They chased ' Soapy ' Smith all the way into Utah; they got him, too." Blaze paused. " That's just something to think about," he added sullenly, and giving My Man the bit, cantered away.

This talk was plain enough for Bodine. His admiration for Blaze continued to grow.

" You're a wise bird," he murmured to himself. " There's no flies on you."

Presently from the corner of the house, Shorty inquired *sotto voce:* " Is he gone?"

Bodine turned on him angrily.

" What kind of a fool play was that you made?" he demanded. " Running like a rabbit, and then trying to get him in the back."

" He come up so quietlike he threw a scare into me," Shorty answered. " Why didn't you tip me off if he was O. K., when I opened the window?"

" How could I? He got you from the start. Held up that tin plate for a mirror. I've told you a dozen times we have nothing to be scared of. Why start the ball rolling by plugging one of these Double A boys? They're with us in this game! You make another play like that and I'm through with you. That goes now, and don't you forget it."

Bodine's temper did not alarm Shorty. They had been together too long.

" He didn't remind you of any one, huh?"

Bodine whirled on his pal.

" Who?" he demanded.

" I can't remember. But I've seen that back before, somewhere."

Shorty's vagueness only caused Bodine to break out again.

" You're loco. A lot of help you'll be to me in this fight."

Shorty said nothing, but took a lantern and followed Kildare's trail through the brush. It led straight to the road. Presently he turned back, convinced he had made a mistake.

The Double A man had expected this very thought. In spite of his aroused suspicions, he had kept on, expecting to be trailed.

" I hope you're satisfied," Bodine snapped at Shorty when he came back. " The man comes on straight business, and rides away as he ought to, even after you tried to spill the beans. You make me sick!"

" Well, I'm thinkin' you'll be sorry some day that you didn't let me get him."

And while they continued to quarrel

Blaze covered the long miles to the Bull's Head, where Acklin was waiting for him.

CHAPTER IX.

"STICK UP YOUR HANDS!"

OLD IRONSIDES arose from his breakfast table the following morning determined to see Acklin. So far José had met the issue stoically. For that reason perhaps he realized fully his desperate position. The value of every acre he owned was dependent upon the water which had disappeared overnight. Its loss meant the sweeping away of the fruits of a lifetime of saving and unremitting toil. He knew he was too old to begin all over again.

Even when Esteban had told him of the wire barrier the Double A had strung across the valley he refused to believe that Acklin had deliberately set out to steal their water. A cloudburst back in the hills, or a cave-in where the creek came through Martin Cañon, might be responsible. When Webster Creek began to overflow its banks, however, the old Basque had to admit the worst. What puzzled him was Bodine's complicity. The Double A had always played a lone hand.

Basquelike, he took no counsel of his womenfolk in times of stress. Mercedes, however, stepped over this age-old convention. She tried to persuade him against going to the Bull's Head.

"Father," she pleaded in Spanish, "is it safe? Why won't you take your rifle?"

"Nonsense!" José answered, but he bent down from his horse to pat her head. "What need have I of a gun? I go in broad daylight by the main traveled road. Men know that I do not come to steal."

Tearfully Mercedes watched her father and brother ride away. A great silence hung over the Rancho Buena Vista. Even the tiny Basilio was subdued.

At the end of their fence Esteban pulled up his horse and prepared to turn back.

"Do you think he will see you?" he asked as his father murmured good-by.

"If he is not guilty he will," José replied sagaciously. "I am as intent on finding out where he stands as I am on seeing the man. I know, therefore, that I will not have my ride for nothing."

Acklin had foreseen this visit. It was certain to be a bad half hour. Thought of its unpleasantness solely, and not a sense of shame for his duplicity, caused him to arrange hurriedly for an alleged trip to the Owyhee.

"I'll be back to-morrow," he told Cash. "But if any one asks, say you don't know. In the meantime you sit tight. Answer no questions. I doubt if they can get a court order to cross our line. When I've finished at the Bar Circle I'm going over to the X L. Peter has a phone, so you can get me there if you need me in a hurry. If Bodine oversteps himself you get in touch with me."

Therefore it followed that about the same time José left the rancho Acklin departed from the Bull's Head.

By word of mouth from his men, the news of the old Basque's coming had been relayed to Cash. He had flashed back to them not to molest the visitor.

The foreman was guilty of staging his reception of Old Ironsides. With an air of preoccupation he sat down at Acklin's desk and began going over some tally books. When he saw the old man swing into the ranch yard he gave up his mimic show in disgust. Cash stood ready to do him out of his ranch if he could; but the old man radiated such an air of honesty that the foreman turned his back on anything as pretty as the dumb show he had arranged. He knew José to be a speaker of true words. That in itself was sufficient to gain respect from the unsentimental Cash. Consequently he got out of his chair and walked to the open door.

"*Buenos dios, señor,*" he called as the dignified old Basque strode up the steps.

José returned the salutation ceremoniously.

"Is the señor busy?" he inquired.

Cash surmised the effort it cost the man to appear so calm. His looks gave a hint of the strain he was under.

"The boss isn't home," Morrow answered, almost glad that he could speak the truth. "He left for the Owyhee early this morning. Don't expect him back to-day, neither."

José mopped his forehead.

" Anything I can do for you?" Cash suggested.

It was a full minute before the other replied.

" There is hardly a drop of water in Rebel Creek," he stated. " You know, of course, that the old wash of the Webster is running over its banks."

The foreman bent over to pick up a sliver of wood.

" Seems though I heard something about it."

" The señor, he had *heard* of it, too?"

The foreman felt the rebuke for his flippancy.

" I imagine he did. We've been building some fence down there."

" Yes!" José's tones were icy cold. " I came to-day to ask permission to cross that fence. My neighbors have sought to see beyond it, and they have been driven away. Both you and Acklin know me. I lay no hand on what is not mine. Unless there has been trickery on your part, you cannot refuse me."

Cash hitched up his trousers.

" I ain't got any complaint against your honesty," he stammered. " But you're askin' something I can't allow. I've got orders to let no one through. And for about twenty-five years I been aimin' to see that orders are carried out around here."

" Your answer is what I should have expected," Old Ironsides said, unable to smother his anger. " I wanted Señor Acklin to convict himself before I judged him. I have my answer! I see now that he runs away; he is a coward, too."

Without another word he mounted his horse and struck off down the valley. Morrow shook his head as he watched him go. Ten minutes later he had forgotten the incident. Life had proved to Cash that sentiment is usually wrong.

Once he had arrived at the rancho, José retired to the patio to lay his plans for the meeting that evening. Esteban he sent to Paradise. By noon the result of José's errand had spread throughout the valley.

The rebuff his father had met only increased Esteban's desire for quick revenge on Bodine and the Double A.

This waiting and appealing to the law did not suit the hot-headed boy. What had the law ever won for any of them?

His eloquence soon gave Esteban a following. His crowd had grown in strength until by night Tuscarora and José had become alarmed. The boy's success in town was sure to make him try to run away with the meeting later on.

" You are right, Joe," José said when Tuscarora told him. " Violence would win for us to-night. But we could not hold our gains. We would be outside the law. And I think that is just what Acklin is hoping we will do. We won't start until ten o'clock. That will give everybody a chance to get here before we begin. You come early, my friend."

Esteban, however, did not plan to wait for the meeting. With about half a dozen chosen companions he schemed to ride around the Double A wire and see for himself just what had happened.

He rightly figured that the men on guard would be best caught unawares early in the evening. He therefore planned to have his friends make a demonstration directly north of town. As soon as the twilight faded and while they were engaging the attention of Acklin's men, he hoped to steal unobserved through the foothills below the Chimney.

His father had been honest and considerate of everybody; and too often had he turned the other cheek that peace might continue in the valley. Under his leadership his people had been satisfied with less than their share. This humility, this bending of the knee, might be well enough for Mexicans; but he was no Latin. In his veins was the blood of the gypsying Celt. It gave him vision enough to see that the way of the Basques and these English-speaking people did not lie together.

The *rat-tat-tat* of firing put an end to his meditation. As he listened the shooting grew in violence. It was far off. The reports came muffled, and deadened.

From where he waited a short three hundred yards brought him to the road that dipped down into the valley across the Double A line. Once he had gained it he let his horse out in earnest. It was from the

rear that danger threatened. Speed was his safeguard.

He reached the willows in the creek bottom none too soon. Hardly had he thrown his horse when Cash and his men thundered by. Morrow was determined only upon getting to the scene of action as quickly as possible. He began to wonder as he left the creek behind if this sortie north of town was not a feint. He knew, by the way in which the firing continued, that his men were holding their own over there. He held up his hand until he caught Blaze's eye.

"Hike back to the creek," he ordered. "Watch out. This thing to the west looks crooked to me."

In ten minutes Blaze had retraced his way to within a hundred yards of the spot where Esteban was. So, unaware of each other, stalker and stalked made their way downstream on opposite banks.

Blaze found the going much better on his side of the creek. Once My Man stepped on a broken-down willow that snapped with a bang under his weight. The report reached the boy, now several hundred yards behind. A cold sweat broke out on the young Basque. The horse had passed on to a grassy knoll, and no further sound reached the listener. Esteban dismissed it for a wildcat or coyote.

As he had listened the murmur of purring, splashing water sang in his ears. He nodded his head silently. Rebel Creek still flowed here as of old! He went on. Unseen branches of friendly willows slapped him in the face as he led his pony along. Less than half an hour from now the moon would be up. He knew he must be below the wire before then.

Blaze had drawn ahead while Esteban waited. He found everything quiet at the confluence of the two creeks. He even stopped to light a cigarette. He surveyed Bodine's work with disgust. Fording the creek, he followed the wire east of the willows for a short distance. Seeing nothing suspicious, he turned and was about to retrace his way to the darkness of the trees when My Man's nostrils quivered. The wind had borne the horse its telltale message.

The rim of the golden-yellow moon crept above the range at Kildare's back, silhouetting him in its glowing fire. Catlike, he slid from his saddle. Below him a few yards, a rock, outcropping, lay in shadow. Already the moon was searching out the hillside that fell away to the willows. Dropping the rein over My Man's head, Blaze wriggled on his stomach until he reached the rocky ledge.

No hint of lurking danger came to Esteban as he continued down the stream. Once his pony stopped momentarily. The boy's voice quavered as he forced his horse onward. He had not far to go. The sandy bottom widened; a turning, and he stood where the Rebel poured into the Webster.

Esteban got down on his hands and knees and studied the bank of rock and sand that filled the channel of the creek, all unmindful of the grim figure that lay on the rocks above him.

He slid into the water. It came to his armpits. Breasting the current, he waded to where the cloudburst had once closed the mouth of the Webster. No such barrier arose now. Unimpeded, the water swept by him. The theft was plain and certain.

Wet and bedraggled, Esteban crawled out on the bank. A glance to the eastward told him he had tarried too long. There was nothing to do but to break for the open and race to the Chimney. The firing below him had died away. With every nerve on edge he fingered his gun and raked the gray with his spurs.

In a flash he was free of the underbrush. But he had not gone twenty yards before something moved in front of him. It was My Man, grazing where he had been left. The boy could not turn back. A second brought him abreast of the rocky ledge.

Esteban's keen eyes located his enemy as he crouched, rifle at his shoulder, on the outcropping. Eye and finger acted at the same moment in the young Basque. In wild panic he emptied his gun.

A curse and a low cry of pain said that a bullet had found its mark. He saw the wounded man disappear; but the next instant he heard him running.

From the road across the creek came the cries of men and the patter of rapidly driven horses. With savage energy Esteban drove

his spurs home. His mount, the gray Bodine had broken for him, leaped ahead in mile-devouring strides. Once he reached the road he would be unbeatable.

Blaze felt his arm. It burned as though he had been branded with an iron. He did not recognize Esteban; but when he saw him head for the road he guessed his intention. The way around by the Chimney was the only means of escape. Kildare got into his saddle and lined straight for it. The burning hole in his shoulder made him realize where he stood.

His short cut took him beyond sound of the reënforcements coming to his aid.

He likewise lost track of Esteban; the boy also lost sight of him and began to breathe easier. The gray had left his pursuers far behind.

Blaze reached the Chimney in advance of the Basque by a full minute. He found the road, in front of the wall of rock, in darkness. No ray of moonlight penetrated there. Slipping from his saddle, he waited. In the distance he could hear the rush of a madly ridden horse. Blaze sent My Man into the brush at his left, and flattened himself against the wall of the Chimney.

The tattoo of the flying hoofs grew louder and louder. Another instant and the gray was upon him. The fence came almost to the road. The boy on the gray's back pulled him up, and wheeled him to swing down into the valley south of the wire. Blaze jumped for the bridle, and with his uninjured arm jabbed his six-gun into Esteban's ribs.

"Stick up your hands!" he whipped into the boy's very ear.

Esteban's surprise was complete. But instinctively he made a lunge for his gun.

"Another inch," the man at his horse's head warned, "and I'll drop you out of that saddle!"

The gray shied, dragging Blaze into the moonlight. Recognition was simultaneous with both. Blaze brought his gun down with a shudder. The boy would never know how near he had been to death.

Esteban saw the blood-covered arm.

"You?" He questioned when he could speak. "Well, why don't you shoot?" he dared.

Blaze shook his head. A memory of Mercedes came to him. What was he to do with this young hot-headed, irresponsible boy?

The pursuing horsemen pounded at their back. Esteban stiffened.

"You fan it out of here!" Blaze growled. "You thank the moon, not me, that you are alive to do it."

He brought his hand down on the gray's flank. The horse bounded away. Blaze fired his gun to help him along.

Another second and Cash reined up beside Blaze.

"Did you get him?" he roared.

"He got me!" Blaze winced as he lifted his arms. "Plugged me back there, at the creek."

CHAPTER X.

ESTEBAN IS A HERO.

ONE-EYED MANUEL was lazily polishing and arranging his glasses into a formidable pyramid when Buck Bodine banged open the swinging doors and strode menacingly up to the bar.

He had not known what he would find. Over at the ranch the noise of the guns had sounded like the echoes of a battle. Curiosity and his bravado had brought him to this Basque stronghold. But the wind had sent no murmur of the shooting into town. Tuscarora and the others had left for the meeting some time ago.

Bodine wondered if their absence argued any connection with the fray. It did not seem reasonable that every one had gone to the meeting. He had come to town expecting to find all sorts of excitement. Shorty and Gloomy had tried to dissuade Bodine. He had smiled at them contemptuously. When he wanted a thing he went after it.

The firing had been sweet music to Bodine's ears. Whatever might be the outcome, he figured it could not be other than to his liking. He *wanted* gun-play. He had spoken the truth when he told Blaze that the law was not his way. He hated the law. Life had done nothing but make him suspicious of it. In his heart he prayed that the Double A had become entangled

in a serious shooting affair. It would mean an old-fashioned cowman's war. Acklin could not back out then. And if it came to a struggle of that kind, his own insignificant forces would be only a drop in the proverbial bucket. The Double A would have to fight both his battle and their own.

The fact that the saloon was almost deserted did not serve to soothe his temper. He had catapulted into the place expecting to be jumped. Therefore, when he found he had girded his loins for nothing he sulked.

Manuel's back was to the door. He caught a flash of his customer in the mirror. He had not forgotten Bodine. The bad blood between the two men had not turned to water. The Mexican's dead eye screwed itself into an ugly wrinkle. His livid scars, left by the knife that had cost him his eye, grew white. That day fifty men had threatened Bodine's life. Had the men heard and come here for revenge?

He kept his back to Bodine, pretending that he had not seen him come in. It was his crude way of attempting to play for time.

Buck took his action for something else. An empty glass stood close to where he leaned against the bar. With an oath he picked it up and smashed it against the floor.

Manuel turned as if shot.

" Where's all the Basque *gente* to-night?" he asked insolently. " Bah!"

He turned without waiting for the Mexican to reply. In fact, he expected no answer to his question. It was only his way of telling Manuel that he came there without regard for any Basque.

Buck walked to the door. Over his shoulder he threw a parting to the cowering Mexican: " You need those pink pills, *carisima!*"

With growing anger he strutted about the deserted town, trying to learn what had happened at the fence. His impatience was akin to that with which Juan and Romero Ugarde and young Salvator Rodriguez and their fellow conspirators waited at the sheep corral north of the Ugarde ranch for the belated Esteban.

They had come off untouched from their brush with the Double A men. But their elation had waned perceptibly as they sat there cooling their heels. The pessimistic Romero voiced the opinion that they should never see Esteban alive. The others were almost ready to agree with him when the boy dashed in among them.

Esteban's regard for himself had altered largely in the five miles he had come from the Chimney. With the cheers of his followers ringing in his ears he was not inclined to tell them by what fortunate circumstance he was here, safe and sound. Therefore, his colorful recital held no mention of Kildare. When he had finished his position as their leader was secure.

" Now they will listen to us!" Romero asserted. " And if the old graybeards won't fight we will strike by ourselves."

Cries of approval met this statement.

" You are right, Romero!" Esteban cried, fired by their enthusiasm. " We'll put an end, once for all, to this talk of appealing to the law. When I've told them my story there'll be plenty to side with us."

What a sweet morsel this bit of logic would have been for Bodine! He had foreseen it from the start.

With a jingle of spur chains they headed for the rancho. Esteban knew he could not change his story. He had sworn to take sides against his father, and these boys would see that he kept his word. The nearer he drew to home the more formidable became his task. He gritted his teeth in contemplation of it. But this mood passed. Then for the first time he wondered why Kildare had let him escape.

This chain of reasoning led him to Mercedes. What would she say when he told her about the man? Immediately he realized that he could not tell her.

In the midst of this self-questioning they came into sight of the rancho. Esteban stopped for a consultation. He was against dashing into the meeting hit-or-miss. His entrance, properly timed, was calculated to have a very dramatic effect. He did not intend to be cheated out of it. Accordingly he dispatched Romero to reconnoiter the ground for him.

His lieutenant stole up to the hacienda unobserved. Mingling with the crowd, he soon found that the supposed attack on the

fence was the sole topic of conversation. For, although some of them had left Paradise in ignorance of it, the news had reached them here. Only by inference had they been able to surmise who had taken part in the affair.

Romero waited until the meeting got under way before he stole back to his crowd. The dead silence which had greeted old José's opening speech had impressed young Ugarde. These men were here for business!

Tuscarora followed José. He had finished his appeal for law and order and was about to show them the foolhardiness of resorting to the tactics some of their young men had employed earlier in the evening when the wild clatter of rapidly driven horses forced him to stop.

There was a hardening of faces, a quick look for cover, and a drawing of guns.

Esteban could not have hoped for a more dramatic entrance. He tramped authoritatively to the center of the big room he knew so well. As soon as they recognized him the meeting resumed some of its orderly appearance. The boy's father got to his feet.

"What kind of play is this?" he demanded, his face purple with anger. José felt that his son's conduct was nothing short of preposterous. The upstart! Had the boy no respect for his elders?

"Do I rightly suppose that you come from this shooting affair?"

"I come from the other side of the Double A wire!" the boy hurled back, determined to give as good as he received.

In an instant the meeting was in an uproar.

Cries of "Tell us what you saw!" and "Now we shall know the truth!" rang out. The ranchers had not come there to listen to talk of peace and the law. They had been robbed, and they wanted action. At last, it seemed, the meeting was going to get somewhere.

Cesar Ferri, a great hulk of a man from down on the river, got to his feet, and in a voice to match his weight, shouted for silence. The very size of the man seemed to have a commanding effect.

"Give the boy a chance!" he cried. "Tell us how you got by the fence."

Esteban told them; and the murmurs of approval that greeted him as he went along gave the boy the courage he needed. José and Tuscarora exchanged glances. The thing they had feared was happening.

"I ran my hands over every inch of that pile of rock and sand. No storm ever put it there! It is full of granite and quartz stringers that are as sharp as the day they were blown out of the solid rock."

He paused to let this information sink home.

"But they didn't stop there! The sandbar that stretched across the mouth of Webster Creek is gone. The water came up to my neck. Now," he cried, "you know the truth! Why did Acklin build that fence to keep us out if what I say is not so? Are you satisfied to wait for the law in the face of this?"

"*Dos mio,* no!" Cesar yelled. "I fight! What good is that water if we wait three months to get it? In two weeks our crops will be dead! Where will we be next winter, then?"

"It isn't only that we are robbed of our water," Romero's father added, "but it is wasted before our eyes. We all know about the sink that swallows every drop that reaches it; and west of town Webster Creek was running full to its banks to-day."

"Well, ain't it got a right to run there?" The question came over the heads of the crowd like the snap of a whip.

As one man they turned and saw Bodine in the doorway, standing head and shoulders above everybody else in the room, a sardonic smile playing about his mouth.

CHAPTER XI.

"ACKLIN'S DOG!"

FOR the second time that night revolvers were snatched from their holsters. A hair-trigger stillness crept into the room. Bodine's mouth lost its grin and went hard. The cords in his neck stood out. Into his eyes came the steely glitter of the killer.

Esteban was the first to move. Trembling with fury that made him almost impotent, he walked toward Bodine and, with

his finger at the man's face, shouted: "You stool-pigeon! You traitor! Why do you come here?"

Besides himself with rage, the boy drew his gun, and, leveling it at Bodine, he cried in a voice that shook with emotion: "Get out of here, or I'll blow your head off!"

Bodine expected such a play. He could have beaten Esteban to the draw. But he showed his nerve in choosing not to. If he had made the attempt some one would have got him. He held the boy's eyes now in an hypnotic stare.

Mercedes, attracted by the noise of her brother's attack, had edged close to the storm-center. With marvelous swiftness she reached for Esteban's gun. Bodine looked at her with a sense of relief. He was glad that it had not been she who attacked him.

The boy tried to fight her off, but José got between them and took the gun. With blazing eyes he confronted his son.

"Would you commit murder in your own home?" he burst out. "This is still my house. I am still its master!"

Father and son glared at each other, but the weight of a score of years of submission was too much for the boy. He turned and slunk away. At the door he called back venomously: "Acklin's dog! That's what you are!"

José appeared not to notice his son's departure, so intently did he watch Bodine. Even Mercedes had slipped out without attracting his attention.

For the first time that night Buck began to grow uneasy. The dignity of the old Basque was unassailable. When all was said and done, it would be from José and his kind, backed up by the law, that the real danger would threaten, and he feared it. He knew it was time for speech. He tried to address them all, but against his will his gaze reverted to Old Ironsides.

"He's only a kid!" he repeated. "Just a kid! This is no time for kindergarten cackle. I'm going to talk to men, like a man would. I bought out old Hank Webster in good faith. I never saw Acklin until I met him in this very house. Before I bought that place I had the records searched. The State says I am entitled to fourteen inches of water out of Webster Creek. And I'm going to get it."

"The law will decide that, señor." It was José's first direct statement to Bodine. There was an air of finality about it.

"Fourteen inches?" Tuscarora questioned sarcastically. "You have taken it all."

"You mean," Bodine contradicted, "that I'm getting it all. Well, I don't need it. Suppose we forget for a moment how the water changed its course and consider the facts. I've got the water now. You can't go against that. Suppose we turn it back into the Rebel, do I get my share?"

"If you did, señor, there would be none left for us," José answered. "I know Webster filed for fourteen inches of water, but if we agree to any such compromise there won't be an inch of water left to flow into the Washoe. Acklin and you would have it all, and we would be helping you to it. We have all filed, and been granted water rights on either Rebel Creek or the Little Washoe. What about that?"

"My rights have priority over all other water rights in this valley, exceptin' Acklin's!" Buck tried to drop this statement like a bombshell. He gazed about the room to watch its effect.

José shook his head judicially.

"Again I say, the law will decide! If Acklin builds a fence on his own property to keep us out, that is his right. If we destroy it, or trespass on his land, and resort to our guns, then we are outside the law. We want to go into court with clean hands!"

"You bet," Tuscarora chimed in. "In a week we will find out where we're at. We all know Tom Brand. He's been on the square with us every time. I'll run down and see him."

The little man stopped short. His eyes singled out Bodine: "Now, suppose you beat it out of here, big fellow. The going may be rough if you wait until this meeting breaks up."

"Don't come back, either!" some one yelled.

Bodine's eyebrows flattened out.

"I'll go," he muttered. "But not because any one here looks bad to me. I

came to talk peace, but all I've heard is a lot of mouthing about the law. I hope you'll be satisfied with what the law gives you."

"Make the thief go!" a man in the back of the room cried.

The remark made Buck's lips curl in scorn. In silence he started out. He had not gone far when some one tittered: "I hope he takes the right horse."

Bodine's face went scarlet. Ridicule had broken through his armor where everything else had failed. He was thoroughly angry when he reached the door that led to the patio. His offer to compromise had been only a trick to get them on record as recognizing some of his claims. That José had seen through it made it all the more bitter to his taste. With a curse he made for his horse.

He had reached the end of the veranda and was about to open the patio gate when he almost stumbled over Basilio. Mercedes had found the boy awake when she had left the room where the meeting was held, so she had dressed him, and the two of them had wandered about in the moonlight.

She heard the child cry, and saw Bodine raise his foot and brush him aside. In a second she was up with them, and took the little fellow into her arms.

"You fiend!" she cried. "You brute! There is no part of a man about you. There, don't cry, *hermanito*," she crooned. "This beast will pay yet!" To Bodine she said: "It is good you run away before the men come."

Basilio ceased crying, and Mercedes started him into the patio; but she stood her ground and laughed contemptuously at her enemy.

Bodine's cruel mouth held its diabolical grin as he got into his saddle. Once seated, he wheeled his horse on its hind legs, and, reaching down, caught the surprised girl around the waist and lifted her beside him. She bit and scratched him, but he was too strong for her. Bending his head, he kissed her passionately on her unprotected lips. Her finger nails ripped his face as he put her down.

"Laugh now, you little spitfire!" he called back as he used his spurs and waved his hand at her carelessly.

Hot tears came into the girl's eyes. When she gained her room she scrubbed her lips with soap and water until they burned.

CHAPTER XII.

"IT'S OLD IRONSIDES'S KID!"

ESTEBAN'S ignominious retreat smarted him to the heart. He sulked and fumed for a long time before he found the courage to face Romero and the caustic Salvator.

While he had been outside, venting his wrath on the desert night, they made plans of their own. Romero had passed the word to those apparently dissatisfied with the way the meeting was going to be at Cesar's place at midnight. They did not importune Esteban to join them. He felt the rebuff, and immediately resolved to go. Unobserved, he stole to his room, to wait there for his father to retire.

It was his supposed absence that kept José awake. When the meeting had ended he had looked about in vain for the boy. Knowing the ways of his hot-tempered son, he did not believe that Esteban had gone to his room.

Thoughts gloomy and foreboding filled the old man's mind as he walked with lowered head among the withered and dying flowers of the once beautiful patio. He felt that he and his son were far apart in this crisis. And he was old enough to want to lean on his boy. José shook his head sadly.

Above him a window was raised. He saw Mercedes gazing down into the patio. José's face relaxed as he caught sight of her. She more than made up for all the trouble and care life had brought him. Knowing she would not close her eyes until she heard him retire, he shook the ashes from his pipe and went indoors.

Esteban heard him, too, and he chafed in his impatience for fifteen minutes before he dared to move. He had brought his reata to his room, and when he had opened his window he quickly noosed the rope over

a bedpost and slid noiselessly to the ground. It took him some time to reach Ferri's house.

"We have our guns with us; Cesar has tools enough to go around," Romero was saying as Esteban arrived. "We'll go up Rebel Creek as far as the wire. We can cut it before we are discovered. Once inside, you can hold off their men while some of us make short work of that bank. A stick of dynamite will blow it into Idaho! We won't wait for any law! Once we get the water turned where it belongs, Acklin and Bodine will never get it back. If you are willing to try it, raise your hands!"

"*Ole compañeros!*" the massive Cesar shouted. "We will win our battle tonight! Let me see who are the cowards!"

One by one the hands went up, until Romero waved his followers to their horses. At the barn they stopped for shovels and whatever tools Cesar could find. Then with a flourish they fled into the north, twenty strong, Esteban among them. Talk died away as they rode. An eloquent silence hung upon them. And as they moved through the velvety night the man whom they hoped to catch off his guard sipped coffee with a dozen of his riders in the dimly lighted dining room at the Bull's Head. Kildare, his arm bandaged, lounged across the table from Morrow. Somebody yawned. Cash looked at his watch. It was almost two o'clock. Brother Jones called for the coffeepot.

"What ungodly hours for a man of my years and manners!" he moaned. "When do we move, Cash?"

"Any time now," Morrow grumbled. "I suppose if I take you boys down there for nothing, you'll be biting your false teeth for missing a night's sleep. But if we have a brush, and half of you are shot up, it 'll be O. K." He paused. "Somethin' sure to come out of that meetin'. Get that coffee down, and we'll drift."

Melody, Brother Jones, Patterson, and the rest of the men got to their feet and began buckling on their guns.

Cash scratched his head unconsciously. "Wish the big boss was here," he said aloud. "Tried to get him over to the X L. Peter said he hadn't been there. That's funny, too; said he was going there." The foreman paused. "Boys," he went on slowly, in a tone that said he made his decision as he went along, "we're going into the valley *below* our wire!"

Hands stopped moving. Some one dropped a gun. With one accord they turned and regarded him expectantly. Cash caught the tension.

"The fence is fifty yards inside our line," he went on. "We built it there so as to be safe without checking up. We'll go down through the Chimney, and stillhunt from the little coulee that lies halfway to the creek. If we have any trouble we'll be on our own land. They'll never expect to find us outside the fence."

Morrow looked his men over. They had finished strapping on their holsters—evidence that they were agreeable to his plan. The foreman's eyes rested on Blaze. He had picked up his gun along with the others.

"You ain't goin', are you, Kildare—not with that arm?" Cash asked, a note of gruff admiration for the man's pluck creeping into his voice.

"My business arm is all right," Blaze grinned. "I'm aimin' to see this thing through."

Dark screening clouds hid the moon as they made the coulee. Brother Jones started for the creek bottom. He went a hundred yards, when he turned to send them a low, cautious whistle.

Cash held up his hand. The little cavalcade moved quietly to where the old man stood.

"They're coming now," Brother Jones whispered. "About two dozen! They'll be up to the wire in three or four minutes. I caught 'em jumping crost that bare spot round the bend. Now there'll be hell to pay."

"Wait till they get to the fence," Morrow ordered.

One minute—two minutes—a few seconds—and the creek bottom swarmed with men. Morrow's hand went up. The old battle cry of the Double A rang out, and, like the fabled demons of the Andes, Acklin's hired warriors crashed into the bewildered Basques.

In consternation and dismay the invaders tried to recover from their surprise. But the unexpectedness of the attack had destroyed whatever morale they possessed.

Esteban and Romero shrieked at their companions to stand their ground. Neither could swing that madly milling crowd. Shovels and picks were dropped in panicky flight. To get away as quickly as possible seemed to be the one ambition of most of the men from the valley.

Little Salvator and four or five others, however, fought their way to Esteban's side and tried to return the fire of Acklin's riders. But every time the Double A guns roared and ripped wide the darkness some one deserted.

The firing continued. Salvator looked for his companions. Only Esteban, Romero and he were left. Then, seeing the battle was hopeless, he followed his friends. Romero and Esteban had about enough of it, too.

The bank of the creek offered them fair protection. Around the bend the ground flattened out. It meant a wild dash as the Double A men closed in.

Romero rolled the whites of his eyes. No matter what the danger was, he was going to chance it. It was death to stay where they were. With a yell to Esteban he started. The young firebrand was at his heels instantly.

Ten seconds brought them to the flat country where they were an easy target. The Double A guns flashed. One of the boys shrieked and toppled out of his saddle. A second volley followed, but the other Basque was out of sight.

"Who is he?" Cash cried, as Melody and Blaze rode down into the bottom.

The boy lay on his face. Melody turned him over.

"Ain't that too bad?" he groaned. Then to Cash: "It's Old Ironsides's kid!"

Blaze's face was a study.

"Once was not enough for you," he murmured, not unkindly, as he bent to lift Esteban's head.

The boy's face was covered with blood. Blaze pushed the hair back to find the wound. A deep furrow showed where the bullet had torn through the scalp.

Blaze got to his feet. "I don't think he got it deep enough to be serious. Better take him in."

"Sure, take him along," Cash growled. "We can't *eat* him! You take him up, Melody?" Melody nodded. "Take a look around, boys," Cash went on. "Maybe you'll find another one or two along the creek. We'll all turn in when you get back. Say," Cash grinned, "those birds thought the hambone o' hell had hit 'em, didn't they? Yes, sir!"

And as they carried Esteban to the Bull's Head, Mercedes wondered why little Basilio sobbed as he tossed in his tiny bed. Long desert miles stretched between the Rancho Buena Vista and the spot where Esteban fell. And yet, with an intuition rare even among the blind, the little lad knew that something terrible had happened. Mercedes awakened her brother and tried to comfort him.

"What is the matter?" she implored.

"Esteban," he cried. "Something bad has come, *madrecita.*"

The little pet name went unheard. Mercedes only knew her throat was dry with sudden agony. She had had her own misgivings about Esteban.

Silently the frightened girl stole to his room and knocked softly. Getting no answer, she tried the knob, but the door was locked. It seemed to confirm her fears.

Doors were never locked at the rancho.

Mercedes returned to Basilio thoroughly upset. She hesitated about calling her father; but as the minutes went by she felt she must. Hastily throwing on a wrap, she started for José's room. The hallway made a sharp angle as it turned to lead into the wing where he slept. A small window opened on the front yard from the angle.

Without thinking Mercedes stopped and looked down. Esteban's window was plainly visible, and hanging from it she saw the dangling reata.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she gasped. "The child is right!"

With swift feet she ran for her father. Through the closed door she told him what she had discovered. José bade her go back to Basilio. He dressed hurriedly and followed her to the little fellow's bedside.

"Come here, *el hijo mío,*" he said in wistful tones, as he took the boy into his arms. "What is wrong?"

"I heard guns—bad guns. And I pointed my finger where I heard them, and it was toward the end of the bed—north. And I saw Esteban! He was hurt!"

José petted and caressed him until his tears stopped. "There, there, don't let those bad dreams upset you, *niño.*"

In a few minutes the child was asleep.

Then Mercedes and her father tiptoed downstairs. The old Basque pulled the bell cord for Mariano. When the *mozo* appeared, frightened at being called at this unusual hour, José ordered him to get his horse.

Tears filled Mercedes's eyes as she saw her father take down his rifle and fill his long unused belt with cartridges. His set face and sparing words did not serve to lessen her dread.

José sighed and sank into a chair. Mercedes came to him and put her arm about his shoulders.

"The vagaries—the misunderstandings of youth. And still he has been a good boy—a good son. But, *querido,* a boy is only a boy! He forgets that, and I need him now. *Valgame Dios!*—I hope I find him."

A hot tear from Mercedes's eyes fell on his cheek. He drew her face down close to his.

"Don't cry, *niña,*" he begged. "Tears in your eyes always bring your mother close to me. And, oh, you are so like her, so like her, little one. We'll say a prayer for her before I go."

José's eyes were misty when he got to his feet, and to hide his emotion he stormed at the overdue Mariano.

Mercedes caught her father's hand. She did not want him to go. Rather, she wanted him to go, but fear tugged at her heart and made her afraid of seeing him leave.

José bent down from his saddle to kiss her. Mercedes clung to him.

"I am afraid," she said in tones choked with emotion.

"Afraid?"

"For you, father. Why not wait until sunup?" She held his hand to her face. He shook his head. "You'll be careful, dear? I'll wait up until you come back."

"Don't do that, *muchacha,*" the old man pleaded. "I'll find Morrow and learn from him if there has been any trouble. I'll be back in two hours. *Adios, querido!*"

When José had crossed the creek he held to the north until he came to the entrance of Smoky Cañon. In happier times he would have used the trail that led through it to the mesa above, whence an old wood road crossed to the Bull's Head.

He turned his horse into the longer trail that led to the fence and up to the Chimney. As he did so a gun flashed from the rimrocks above him. His horse jumped, and José lurched and fell head foremost to the ground. He rolled over on his side in a brief convulsion and then lay still. No moan or sigh of pain escaped him.

On the rocks high above a tall figure arose and peered down at his victim. A second and he was gone. The sound of a galloping horse came down the cañon. It rapidly died away.

José's horse stared at his fallen master. He came close and nudged him with his nose. But the wide-open, unseeing eyes of the man who had ridden him so long were glazed in death.

Old Ironsides would never ride the trails again!

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHOEVER KILLED HIM WILL PAY."

LONG before the first faint hint of dawn had tinged the sky the Rancho Buena Vista was awake. Mercedes was ashen. First her brother and then her father had ridden away and had failed to return. Unable to stand inaction any longer, she left the house and walked as far as the creek bottom where her father had crossed, listening for any sound that might announce his return.

The stillness oppressed her. Thoroughly frightened, she ran back to the hacienda and roused Mariano. Teresa, his wrinkled and superannuated wife, came with her lord.

The tone in which she commanded him

to hurry made the old *mozo* move faster than he had been wont to do for some years. Teresa opened her eyes, too.

When Mariano returned with only Henaro, Mercedes's face fell. She had not known that her father had sent the other men to the railroad with sheep. But she lost no time in dispatching the vaquero for Kent. Old Mariano was put to service; she sent him to Ugarde's place, because it was nearest.

"Don't come back until you find them," she ordered. "At daylight I will go myself to the Bull's Head. Señor Acklin will talk to me! If my father or brother return before I leave, you shall be told. And if you have word take no thought of your horses in getting it to me. Ride!"

The men went out, and Mercedes sent Teresa upstairs to Basilio. The old Indian obeyed, but she wagged her head from side to side as she left, canting oracularly in a voice that Mercedes could not help but hear: "*Por Dios! Por Dios!* The walls are damp; the ditches smell; last night the sun paled as it went to bed; the dogs ate grass; sorrow, sorrow! I could hear the crow's black wings!"

The closing door put an end to her dismal words. Mercedes caught her pinto and saddled him. A pale yellow tinged the sky above the eastern range. The cold yellow became pink—a frigid, unreal pink; cool blues and purples followed. And then, tone by tone, fire and warmth and life crept into the sky. It was dawn. So long she sat in her saddle without moving. No sound of hurrying horsemen reached her.

Loping along in the still uncertain light, Mercedes's mind centered on the Bull's Head and what she would find there. Acklin's shadow darkened all her thoughts. But even so, she became aware of the insistence of the coyotes' barking. It was not their short yip-yipping so much as the long-drawn, almost wolfish cry that followed. It told her plainly enough that they had cornered something and were waiting for the kill.

Mercedes sent her horse into a gallop. When she topped a shallow arroyo her heart stopped beating as she caught sight of her father's powerful bay standing riderless, his head lowered and sweeping from side to side.

Something snapped in the girl. She lashed her pony into a neck-breaking pace. As she drew near she saw the bay's eyes were rolling. He snorted as she came on, but continued to lace out right and left with his hind legs.

Ringed about him, red tongues sliding out over their wet fangs, crouched the coyote pack. Rabies had spread among them so generally that they were no longer the skulking cowards they had been. Mercedes emptied her gun at them; they slunk away.

She walked her pinto to where the other horse stood swaying. And then—there at his feet, she saw the huddled body of her father. Her flesh quivered; her muscles refused to act.

"Oh! oh! oh! oh!" she moaned. It was a sob of utter grief such as wild animals voice when they are stabbed to the heart. Without knowing how she accomplished it, she slid to the ground. The bay backed off. Mercedes got to her knees and felt her father's cold hand.

She promised herself she would be brave; that she would not give way. Then, with sickening heart, she saw the terrible wound. Tenderly her hands caressed his snow-white beard and hair; the cheeks so cold; the fine strong forehead, rugged even in death. Tears swam in her eyes. She begged him to speak to her. "Come back to me—come, come! Father — father — father! Don't leave me like this. Don't—don't—don't! Oh!"

Then slowly and surely the truth began to creep into her tortured brain. Conviction grew and settled upon her. He was never coming back. Never!

Her tears ceased. Into her face came the stoical hardness of the Basque. In this minute Mercedes left girlhood behind. She thought of her brother. Had he shared a like fate? Dry-eyed she faced that possibility. The depths of her had been sounded at her dead father's side.

Trancelike, she got to her feet and picked up his rifle. She broke it, to find that it had not been discharged. She laid it beside him. The big bay watched her care-

fully. Mercedes called the horse to her. She stroked his nose. "He'll never ride you again, Carbajal."

The sun was clear of the mountains. Above her the buzzards began to circle. She scanned the horizon nervously. What was she to do? The threat of the arching sun made the moving of her father's body imperative. The scavenger horde, gathering above, only waited for the girl to leave. Her own puny strength was not equal to lifting her dead to the bay's back.

There came then, down Smoky Cañon, the pitter-patter of a horse. Mercedes caught sight of him as he struck the flat that stretched back into the rocky defile. With a thrill she recognized Kildare.

When Blaze saw who it was ahead of him, his knees bored into his horse's sides, and My Man raced to where Mercedes stood. The grim figure on the ground, the overwrought girl, and the empty-saddled bay told their own story. The message he brought her would have to wait now. He jumped down, and unconsciously, in his instant sympathy, held out both his hands to her. Without knowing that she did so, her fingers caught and held them.

Blaze shot rapid questions at Mercedes. As she retold her discovery of her father's body, she cried in spite of her determination not to.

"Don't cry, little woman," Blaze murmured consolingly. "Your father was a good man. You've nothing but fine memories left of him. It's hard to see him go this way; but whoever killed him will pay for it. I promise you that."

He got down beside José and examined the torn chest.

"A long-range gun and a high-power bullet did this," he told her. After he got to his feet he scanned the ragged rimrocks nervously; and sought for an excuse to get the girl away. "You'd better ride to the hacienda and get a rig; that is, if you think you're able to make it."

"If you will wait, I go at once," Mercedes answered.

"I'm only too glad to help you."

Mercedes's eyes showed her appreciation.

"You are very kind, señor. Some day I may be able to pay you back."

"I've got all the pay I need right now, señorita," Blaze mumbled as he helped her into her saddle and stood beside her, hat in hand. "I aim to be your friend, if you'll let me."

Mercedes's sad eyes searched his face.

"I have great need of a friend, señor."

Impulsively she placed her hand on his head. In low tones she murmured: "There is a Basque *historio*—what you call—a—a—saying: *'La verdad es amargo; quien te la dice te estima.'* The truth is bitter; he who speaks like that to thee esteems thee very much." Mercedes paused. The man's eyes held her own. "We will speak the truth to each other, I guess, señor."

Straight-backed, the little thoroughbred rode off. Blaze watched her until she was out of sight. "God bless you," he murmured aloud. "I'll keep my word with you."

CHAPTER XIV.

"YOU DOUBLE A SPY!"

THE carefulness with which Kildare examined the death wound, now that he was alone, and the patience with which he set about locating as nearly as possible the spot from which the assailant had fired his bullet, were methodically efficient.

In a dozen ways he pictured the shooting; but always, by the simple means of deduction and common sense his answer led him to the point of rocks above him. As his reasoning continued to bring him time after time to the same conclusion, he became obsessed with the desire to examine the ledge.

Blaze eyed the buzzards circling above him; he picked up José's gun and killed three of them. With a wild screeching, the feathered horde rose until it was a mere speck against the sky.

Hurriedly Blaze turned Jose's face downward and pulled the old man's coat over the head. Quickly then he tore off his own shirt and vest, and draped them over a dead sage brush. On top of it he placed his hat. The result was a crude scarecrow. Leaping into his saddle, he galloped off before the feathered scavengers should return.

When he had gained the rimrocks, Blaze crawled on hands and knees to their edge. For twenty yards he studied the decayed rock. He came to a flat spot, three yards square. Fine sand filled the pockets in the decomposed granite. In one of them there was the unmistakable imprint of a boot-mark. Blaze threw himself down beside it and stretched his length as he imagined the assassin had done. Opposite the indentions his elbows made, as he held a fancied rifle, he found the mark of the other's arm. But the man was taller than he. The distance from toe-mark to elbow was a good five inches longer than the impressions his own body made.

Without disturbing the sand, Blaze searched for other signs that might tell him something. In a hollow, about where the waist of the assailant should have come, he discovered the die-clear stamp of a Navaho luck charm. The outlines were clear and distinct. If lead had been poured into the impression it would have settled.

Kildare's brow wrinkled as he stared at the cryptic Indian letters. The two crossed and inverted capital L's were used on gunbutts, wristlets, buttons, and all the other cowboy equipment that was made at Pendleton. The lower tip of the swastika was bent inward.

"Looks as if a watch charm made that mark," he murmured to himself. "That ought to prove something some day, maybe. Wonder where the empty shell is?"

It lay in the roots of a dwarfed sage brush, two yards away, where the ejector had thrown it.

He was about to leave when, on second thought, he covered the marks in the sand with rocks so that they would not be effaced.

A moving dust cloud that hugged the Rebel caught his eye as it grew in the distance. "That 'll be her, poor little devil," he said to himself. A half an hour later he had donned his shirt and hat and awaited the girl's arrival.

Little Basilio sat beside Mercedes as she drew up her team. She had found that the men had not returned to the rancho.

Blaze reached up his hand to lift the little fellow to the ground. "Hello, little chief," he murmured.

The child recognized the friendly voice. He dug his little fists into his blind eyes in a vain attempt to check his tears.

"Wh—wha—where's my daddy, Señor Blaze?" he echoed.

Basilio knew his father's features only through the touch of his sensitive fingers. Now, as he knelt beside the still form and failed to arouse the old man, he wailed out the agony in his soul.

Dry-eyed, Mercedes watched as Blaze held the little fellow on his knee and petted him. Basilio had been friendly with My Man once before, so Kildare put him on the horse's back now. My Man arched his neck and whinnied as he regarded the boy. The child was reassured immediately.

Then, with Mercedes's help, all that was left of Old Ironsides was placed in the wagon. While they had been busy at their task, Basilio had continued his friendship with the horse. They were ready to go now, and both Mercedes and Blaze turned inquiring eyes at the boy. He was busily playing with the canteen that hung from the saddle. Mercedes's face grew wistful as she regarded the little fellow. On the heels of this, gratitude for the man's thoughtfulness showed, too.

"I want a drink from your water bag, Señor Blaze, please," the child begged.

Mercedes looked at Kildare, and as he nodded ready consent, she reached to the horn of the saddle to lift the canteen to the boy's lips. Unconsciously, she turned it over in her hands. There, stenciled on the wet canvas covering, she saw the capital "A A" with which Acklin stamped his property.

"Oh-h! Oh-h!" she moaned. In that first exclamation there was instant anger and hatred; but the second held only a hurt, and comprehension of shattered faith. Too late, Blaze understood. But before he could speak, Mercedes caught up the canteen, and tigerlike, hurled it to the ground. Swinging on her heels she faced him. "You—a Double A man?" She waited for no answer. Her lips curled in contempt. "A Double A spy!"

Blaze felt his face go white. With cruel insistence Mercedes's flaming eyes swept him.

"And I trusted you! Fool that I was! *Siento mucho que Usted se haya molestade,*" she cried, breaking into Spanish hysterically as her overwrought nerves collapsed. "I rather see my father lie here for those birds in the air than you should have touched him. O Holy Virgin, have you no heart?" she moaned as the tears choked her. "It is not enough that they kill my father; Señor Acklin must send *you* here to spy and pretend to help me."

"Don't convict me without giving me a chance to defend myself," Kildare pleaded. "I am a Double A man; but I didn't come here to spy. You don't know what you've said. Spy? I'd sure take that word from no man! Why do you say Acklin killed your father?"

"Who else so much wanted him out of the way? He had no enemies. Acklin!" It was an unholy word as she uttered it. "And his greed—were all my father feared."

"Even so," Blaze countered, "it's not a cowman's way to shoot in the back or from ambush. I was going to the hacienda when I met you."

There was frank disbelief in the girl's eyes. Blaze knew there was nothing to do now but to tell her the truth.

"We had some shooting at the fence last night. Esteban—"

"Esteban? Is he killed, too?"

"No, he's just wounded. The big boss sent me down to get you. We took the boy in as soon as we found him. He'll be all right in a week or so."

"The Double A covers itself with the blood of my people," she cried.

"Esteban got his fair and square," Blaze answered with heat. "I don't aim to trail with a crowd that kills old men from cover. That's not my cut! I'd do anything I could to ease the ache you've got in your heart. We are goin' now. We can't stay here."

CHAPTER XV.

"I DON'T SHOOT FROM AMBUSH."

KENT was waiting for them at the rancho. Henaro had caught him and brought him back as he was about to leave for Winnemucca. José's death affected Tuscarora visibly. He tried his best to console Mercedes.

When they had finished their sad task the two men went outside.

"I told you there'd be killin'," he murmured.

"I know, but do you think this fight had anything to do with the old man's death?"

"Do I?" There was no mistaking his tone. "What do you say? I'd sure like to hear any other reason for it."

"Well, just the same, I don't believe the Double A had anything to do with it."

"I don't suppose you do," Tuscarora answered, not unkindly. "You know what I *think* about Acklin. The two of you don't belong in the same county. You'll learn!"

Tuscarora retold the way in which Old Ironsides had stood up for law and order at the meeting.

"That's why they wanted him out of the way," he went on. "José wasn't fooled a bit by Acklin or Bodine; so they got him." He paused, his mouth cold and hard. "I suppose they'll get me next. Well! That won't be so bad. I've risked my skin times a-plenty for less. But if I live I aim to find out who did the killing."

Blaze was about to voice his own determination to do likewise when Mercedes joined them, ready for the ride to the Bull's Head. A stoical calmness rested upon her, leaving her a beautiful, madonnalike creature.

Tuscarora rode with them for a mile before he turned for town. He had offered to see the undertaker and priest and do those other errands which death makes necessary.

When they rode into the yard at the Bull's Head, Acklin met them. He dismissed Kildare with a curt nod, but turned a covetous, ingratiating smile on Mercedes. The whiteness of her face and her tired eyes were not lost on Acklin.

"Even though it's bad business that brings you to the Bull's Head," he said sympathetically, in an attempt to draw her out, "I'm mighty glad to welcome you. This is the first chance you've ever given me to do it, Mercedes."

"I do not come here to make talk," Señor Acklin. "Where is my brother?"

"Why, he's upstairs. Melody is looking after him," he went on in an effort to conciliate her. "I'm right sorry the boy was hurt. He should have minded his own business. I wasn't here when this fight happened. Anyways, you shouldn't be so down on me. When this thing has all blown over you'll find that I'm your friend."

His words fell on deaf ears. The impatience and annoyance which flashed alternately into her eyes were the only signs she gave that she had heard. At that moment Acklin would have given his soul to have taken her beautiful body into his arms and smothered her red lips with his kisses. Mercedes must have guessed his thought. She looked to where Kildare lounged on the porch with Chet Devine.

"You sent word to me that Esteban is shot," she said icily; "that he is here! I came willingly. If my brother is here, take me to him."

"Oh, what's the matter, señorita?" Acklin purred. "Of course he's here. You can see him right now. Come on!"

Mercedes followed the big ranchman along the porch to where the two riders sat opposite the entrance to the stairway. As they drew near they heard a voice raised in song; a wild, rollicking, not overly proper bunk-house song. Blaze and Chet had evidently been taking it in.

The singer began another verse:

"I battered down to old Salt Lake,
And found the prophets just a fake.
Dodgin' wives has soured their lives;
It's changed their laughs to frowns.
You never see them smile no more in the
Mormon towns.
Gid-di-ap, gid-di-ap, who said polygamy?
Oh, I will never settle down,
A bachelor I will be,
I'll get a—"

Acklin stopped in the doorway, impeding Mercedes's entrance. "Tell him to stop that noise," he demanded of Chet.

"Hey! Ladies present, Melody!" Chet called. "Cut the song."

Melody stuck his flaming head over the banister above them and called: "'S'all right! Just made his bed."

To Acklin's chagrin, Mercedes shook hands with Melody.

"Sorry you heard me singin' thataway," the red-haired one went on. "But that song's the real McCoy, though. It actually had your brother smilin'."

He led them to where Esteban lay.

The meeting between the wounded boy and his sister was more than the sensitive singer could stand. Not knowing what lay back of the girl's reticence when she failed to answer why their father had not come with her, he turned and went downstairs.

"Come on, Melody," Chet begged, "Finish that song."

But something too deep for words lay on the spirit of the alkali poet. For once he failed to rise to the occasion.

"What's up?" he asked Blaze. "That girl's harder hit than that wound of the kid's should cause her to be. I couldn't stand it."

"That explains it!" Melody exclaimed when Blaze finished telling him about the death of Old Ironsides. "She was game to come here, thinkin' all the time that a Double A bullet got her old man. I'd give my shirt to know who did get him."

Acklin came down and went to his office. As soon as the big man left them Esteban begged his sister to ask his father to forgive him for his disobedience.

He told of the fight. "Our crowd ran! Only Romero and I stayed to the end. At least, father knows I am not a coward."

Mercedes turned away; her brother's reference to their father filled her eyes with tears.

She glanced hurriedly at Esteban.

"You are going home with me," she asserted. "At once!"

Through the open window she called to Melody and Blaze.

"Will you tell the señor," she said, "that I am going to take my brother with me now?"

Melody was back in a minute.

"The big boss says he can't be taken out," he reported in a crestfallen manner.

Esteban's eyes flashed. Some of Mercedes's old fire came back to her.

"What has he to do with it?" she demanded. "I take him when I want to! I will tell him so!"

She found Acklin in his office. He greeted her, seemingly, in a friendly spirit.

"Well, Mercedes," he remarked, "your brother is cheerful enough. He'll pull through."

"I want to take him home."

Acklin got out of his chair.

"Oh, no, not right away!"

"Yes, right away, señor!"

A hard look came into the eyes of the feudal lord. "You can't take him! Don't you know that if I turned him over to the sheriff he would go to the pen for last night's work?"

Acklin came toward her; but she held her ground.

"He can't leave here until I say so," he exclaimed.

He made a movement to reach for her hand, but something in her eyes held him back.

"I am not afraid!" Her voice was defiant. "If my brother goes to jail, you go, too. Not to jail, señor; to the hangman!"

"What are you getting at?" Acklin cried.

"You know very well what I am getting at, you beast! My father was killed last night; shot dead; while he was riding here!"

Acklin's face blanched.

"Good God! Not dead?"

"You should know, señor!"

"I had nothing to do with it, do you hear?" His voice rose with a nasty threat. "I don't shoot from ambush."

"You had more to gain by that shooting than any one else! You have been afraid of my father. My father wanted everything kept within the law. That is why he was killed!"

The sound of their loud talking had reached Melody, who had come downstairs on an alleged errand.

Mercedes saw him. "Señor Acklin has changed his mind," she stated. "Will you get my brother ready?"

Melody looked at the big boss for confirmation of this order. He nodded his head, and turning to his own quarters, slammed the door behind him.

Blaze was sitting on the edge of Esteban's bed when Melody and Mercedes returned. He was as downcast as the boy. Acklin's treatment of the girl puzzled him. Was it possible that she was the stake the owner of the Double A was playing for? Kildare had noticed the big boss's appraisal of Old Ironsides's daughter. Could it be construed into a motive for killing her father?

If Blaze had been free to do as he pleased he would not have sat idly by. Life was losing its flavor. He tried to throw off his mood. In responding to it he knew he was being swayed by sentiment. And sentiment would defeat his ends.

Melody's smile had taken its accustomed place. Blaze was quick to notice the change in him.

"The kid's goin' home all right!" the sorrel-topped one informed him.

Esteban, forgetting his nurse's orders, sat up in bed.

"Maybe you could dress him," Melody went on to Blaze. "I'll go down and see about a rig, then."

So while Mercedes went to the window, Blaze got her brother ready for the trip home. He called to her when he had finished. And as Mercedes saw the tender way in which he cared for Esteban, she regretted her unkind words of that morning.

She wanted to show Blaze that she appreciated all he had done. She came over and sat on the bed beside her brother.

Kildare smiled at her. He had drawn up a chair and was seated alongside of Esteban. Mercedes made a brave attempt to smile back at him. Impulsively she put her hand on his arm.

"I thank you so much for all you have done for me, señor. You have been very kind to us. I hope you will forgive those hot words of mine."

Blaze felt her hand tremble in his. The blood mounted to his face. "I haven't done anything, Miss Mercedes," he replied with embarrassment. "That is—not as much as I'd like to. And as for forgivin' you, shucks! there isn't anything to forgive."

Esteban wondered just what the import of this talk was. Had it anything to do with his conduct? Time after time, as he had lain there, he had asked himself why Kildare had spared him. The man's kindness was still as big a mystery as ever.

"I ought to ask your forgiveness, too," he said sincerely.

"You?" Mercedes caught a hint of mys-

tery in her brother's voice. She looked at Blaze. He got to his feet.

" Better forget it," he mumbled. " Don't amount to anything."

The implication was plain now. The girl knew she was being excluded from something.

" What have you done?" she demanded of Esteban.

" He can thank me for the bullet he got in his shoulder. I shot him—last evening!"

" Was he the one that shot you?" Mercedes asked.

" No! I got hit when we come back later."

Blaze stuck his head out of the window, trying to locate Melody, as Esteban told his sister what had happened at the Chimney.

" His gun was against my ribs," he finished; " but when he recognized me, he let me go."

" You tried to kill him! He did not shoot back? *Madre de Dios!*" she cried. " And I called him a spy!"

Blaze came toward her quickly as he heard her little gasp. " What's the matter?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

" You make me seem ungrateful, señor," Mercedes said in a whisper as she dabbed at her eyes with a tiny handkerchief. " A spy! I must have been mad."

Her voice broke with a sob. Mercedes thought she was beyond tears; Blaze touched her hair softly.

" That's all right, little girl. You folks don't owe me anything. You were pretty excited when I met you this morning—your father and—"

" Father?" Esteban's face went white. Blaze could have cut off his tongue for his slip.

" What's that about father?" the boy demanded again. " Has he been hurt—killed? Did somebody get him?" His voice rose to a scream as he tried to get to his feet.

With a cry, Mercedes's head dropped to the edge of the bed. In spite of Kildare's pleading she broke down and wept bitterly. A shadow crossed the boy's face. He understood. This explained everything to him. As Blaze watched the young Basque he seemed to grow mature; to be touched by the hand of time.

" *Pobre de mi padre!*" he cried. His breath seemed to stop. Murder came into his eyes.

Kildare turned to Mercedes. As Blaze did so Esteban managed to get to his feet by clutching a bed-post. Melody came in just then and caught the boy as he tottered.

Esteban struggled to free himself from Melody's arms. " Don't touch me!" he cried. " Damn the Double A!"

They were all on their feet. Blaze tried to get hold of the boy. The young Basque turned on him. " That goes for you, too, Kildare. I don't want any favors from any man that takes his bread from Acklin."

Mercedes implored him to stop.

" No!" he answered her. " Get me out of here right away. I don't care if I die on the way; get me out of here!"

The boy was no match for Melody's strength. Against his will he was forced down to the bed.

" For the love of Pete! What's the matter?" the happy-go-lucky poet demanded.

" Matter? My father's been killed! Killed! Some one in this outfit did it, too!"

" You don't think we would do a rotten thing like that, do you?" Blaze asked sharply.

" I do!" Esteban glared back defiantly. " Cowmen are always right," he mocked; " and sheepmen are always wrong. Say, I'm sick of that kind of talk. Get me out of here!"

" Well, you can't go alone," Kildare answered. " I'll take you, if you'll let me."

" Please," Mercedes begged. " Don't make another scene."

" Anything to get away," replied Esteban.

" Guess I'll have to drive him home," Melody stated.

" How's that?" Blaze asked.

" When I drove up with the rig Acklin called me in and told me I should go. If you'll give me a hand we'll get started."

Blaze saw them off. When they were gone he tried to sleep, but as tired as he was, sleep would not come.

Overhead the sun hung in the sky, a copper-colored ingot fresh from a furnace. Its

heat waves blistered the poplars and crept into the house. McDermot, the filer, was sharpening tools in a shed in the yard. Every time he put steel to the grindstone the resulting screech sent a shiver through Kildare's body.

Charlie was hammering his supper call on his anvil when Melody returned. Blaze came downstairs, and they went in to eat together.

" You didn't miss anything by not goin'," Melody began. " The girl's a whiz, as I've always said; but Esteban is a bad hombre. His sister stands the gaff better than he does. Things are beginnin' to look awful in the valley. The alfalfa is a sight! The rancho's just burnt brown."

With an angry clank of spur chains, Cash strode into the room. " Is this a tea party?" he bellowed. " Or are you fellows on a vacation? Snap it up! I want you on that fence before the sun goes down."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Police Post at Chimwa

By L. PATRICK GREENE

WHEN John Holt left the headquarters of the Rhodesian Mounted Police *en route* for Chimwa, the " old timers " shook their heads regretfully and cursed the authorities for sending such a clean, likable chap to that pest hole. Some tried to induce Holt to request to be excused from duty at the post, and when he laughed at them, telling them that it was just what he wanted, they spoke of the slimy horror of the place; told him that he would either die of malaria—as had Searles, the man he was to succeed as trooper-in-charge—or, and this was worse, would succumb to the ungodly, unclean lures of native women. Searles had done that, too.

" That's the only way a man can live at all in a place like Chimwa," said one of the old timers. " And at that, you don't

live very long. You die, anyway; but if you live alone you'll go insane first with the loneliness of it."

And Holt had laughed.

He was young; he was healthy and a trained athlete; he had a goodly array of clean-living ancestors back of him. He did not doubt the pessimistic tales the old timers told of Chimwa, but he was confident of his ability to rise above its insidious snares.

Holt aspired to commissioned rank, and, realizing that at headquarters he was but one among many, he had applied for his transfer. At Chimwa, he thought, he could show the stuff he was made of. If he could make good there, where so many had failed, then he would have achieved a great deal toward the realization of his ambitions.

Something like this was in the mind of the adjutant of the corps when Holt's captain objected to the youngster being sent to "the worst hole in the country."

"He's applied for the post," the adjutant said, "and I shall send him there. If he's got the stuff in him for a commission he'll pull through all right; if not—well, we ought to know it."

"But," the captain expostulated, "it's hopeless to attempt any constructive work there. You know that. There'll be nothing for him to do save mark off the days on a calendar. That's no test of a man's character."

"It's the best test," returned the adjutant. "I'll be satisfied if he keeps himself *clean*. That's all I ask. If a man can't control himself, he's certainly not qualified to be in authority over others."

"How long are you going to keep him there?" asked the captain.

"We're going to close up the post for good next January—that's eight months ahead. Holt shall stay until then if his health holds out. I'll send Blake out to close up the post. He will report to me fully on the condition of the camp and on the moral condition of Trooper Holt."

II.

Holt sat on a rock overhanging the sluggish river which flows just below the police post at Chimwa. He had been at the post nearly six months, and during that time had been completely isolated from his own kind. Only two white men had he seen in that period. One had been a trader who paid him a brief passing call; on another occasion an old prospector had stopped overnight at his hut. That was all. Holt's cheeks were hollow and covered with the stubbly growth of several shaveless weeks; his eyelids were swollen and inflamed; he was painfully thin, and his muscles twitched continually.

But these things were only physical and explained by the fact that he had just recovered from a severe attack of malignant malaria. For three days he had moaned deliriously of cooling springs, of boyhood days. His native "boys" had been faithful. They bathed his burning body with tepid water; they brewed nauseating concoctions and forced him to drink them. If it had not been for their care he would have died.

And now he was resenting their loyalty. "Why didn't I die?" he muttered. "It would have been the easiest way out."

More than a physical change had come over Holt since he left headquarters. Some subtle influence had attacked and beaten down his moral forces. A glance at the man's filthy, unkempt uniform was sufficient proof of that.

When Holt first came to the post he was full of the buoyant enthusiasm of youth. He was full of plans—well conceived plans—for the betterment of the district under his control.

Here a swamp should be drained; there a road cut through the tangled undergrowth. New quarters should be built for himself and the native police; he would patrol the district constantly. But all this, as he soon found, he could not do himself, and the natives objected strenuously to the things he planned for their betterment. They refused to coöperate with him.

"We are content with things as they are," they told him, and indignantly refused to help him in any way. They regarded him from that time with open suspicion, and it seemed to Holt that Chimwa had sapped his energy even in those first few

days. It was so easy to let good enough alone.

" It wouldn't have been so bad if there was a chance to do some hunting. This is a hell of a hole."

Holt spoke aloud, and there was a world of bitterness in his voice. The wild animals of the bush, he had quickly found, gave Chimwa a wide berth. Elephants feared the insecure foothold offered by the slimy morasses of the valley; the various species of buck, and the giraffe and the zebra—all the grass-feeding animals—finding no sustenance in the rank, sour growth, avoided the valley as they would a plague spot. Because of this the wilder beasts were also lacking.

A splashing noise in the river attracted Holt's attention, and he watched with expressionless eyes two crocodiles fighting over their prey, lashing the water to a foam with their powerful tails. Once a goat bleated faintly, and then all was silent. The monsters had disappeared. Only a faint tinge of red upon the yellow, murky waters, and a strong musklike scent, remained as evidence of the " bush " tragedy which had been enacted.

Holt smiled grimly. It was an old story to him.

He knew too well how the loathsome beasts watched the daily watering of cattle, waiting for one to stray out too far. In the deep waters above and below the ford they tarried, never coming into the shallow water of the ford itself. There life seemed to be safe—for the maidens who came down to fill their calabashes.

A native policeman came down the path leading to the ford. His uniform was ragged and dirty. The brass buttons of his uniform and the buckle of his belt were covered with verdigris. His bearing was one of arrogance, and as he passed the white man he grinned with impudent familiarity. He made no pretense of saluting. Holt watched the man cross the ford and vanish from sight in the long, wild grass of the jungle.

How he hated that rank growth. It was unwholesome; it savored of the slime from which it sprang. It was of a gray-green shade, a sickening tint reminiscent of a decaying log in a stagnant pool. The clouds and river seemed to reflect the greenness. Holt was surrounded by it—above, below, and on all sides. It was depressing. It seemed to crush him physically.

When Holt first came to the post he had drilled the natives daily; had seen to it that they kept their equipment clean and comported themselves in an orderly fashion.

They obeyed his commands with great inward amusement. It was an old story to them. Other white men who had been in charge of the post had acted in a similar manner—at first.

They knew by experience that in a little while the white man would be only too glad to let things slide; to loll about in his pyjamas, drinking—always drinking. White men always seemed to turn to drink—drink and women—when they were unhappy. They waited patiently for that time to come—smiled indulgently as Holt tried to keep his enthusiasm alive—and shouted gleefully in the secrecy of their huts as they noted his steps downward.

It would have been easier for Holt had there been some definite thing which *had* to be done; if some problem involving his district required instant solution. He would have welcomed a revolt.

It was the forced inactivity which wore down his moral stamina. The district was thinly populated; the natives were law-abiding; there was no incentive to go out and do things.

Day after day, week after week, Holt had sat in his hut in a state of semi-stupor, listening to the heavy patter of rain. It seemed to have had a hypnotic influence on him. With the passing of days his enthusiasm vanished. The sordid atmosphere of the place embogged him, killed all spontaneity of thought, and his reaction to all things was lethargic.

It seemed as though the power to see things in their proper proportion had left him. He hated alike the rising and the setting of the sun. Such reading matter as he had with him he quickly exhausted. His mails were infrequent, and he felt as though he was forgotten by the civilized world—that no one cared—and, having accepted

this thought, he had ceased to care himself. Holt's let down had not been a sudden affair. He fought hard to retain his poise —to keep his head above the mire of African immorality—but it seemed as though all things had conspired against him. His appetite quickly failed him. A man soon gets tired of tinned beef; murky coffee and soggy bread weigh heavily; condensed milk spread upon a pulpy mess miscalled " boiled rice " fails to appeal.

Holt had sat down daily to such meals. He had given up all attempts to inspire his cook boy to better things, and—well, he had not been inside the kitchen for a long time. He did not care to think of the filthy condition in which he knew it to be. When he arrived at the post—a long six months ago—a native woman, comely, as native women go, came out of one of the huts to greet him.

" Me glad to see you," she said in mission English.

" And who are you?" he had asked.

" Me? My name Mary. Me was Baas Searles's woman. Baas Searles no good man. He give me no money; he beat me. Mary glad Searles is dead. Mary your woman now."

With a feeling of disgust which almost sickened him Holt had driven her away.

" Yes, I go now," she had called back to him: " but by and by, maybe, you send for me. Maybe I come; maybe not."

He thought of her words a great deal during the torrid nights when sleep was impossible.

III.

" WHY the hell don't you get yourself a woman?" the trader who was passing through Chimwa had asked; then, noting Holt's look of disgust, he had continued, with a sneering laugh:

" Oh, I've met you goody good chaps before. You always fall the hardest. Lord, man, what's the sense of being squeamish. Think of the comfort you're missing. Think of having somebody to do your washing and mending; to cook your meals in a decent way. No need to bother about cook boys. The best of them are dirty.

" When you leave here to go back among white folks, you don't have to worry. Give your woman a quid and a bottle of rum, and she'll go back to her own people rich and happy. When folks at the settlement ask you questions you can say, as all the rest do, that a man must be pretty low down to take a native wife. They all say that, but they've all done it."

The trader ended with a little cynical laugh.

A few weeks after an old prospector happened by.

" It's a thing I don't hold with generally, son," he had said. " But in a place like this—well, I reckon it's the only thing to do. Sure! It's necessary. These native women know how to cure fever; know a lot about herbs, they do. And they keep a chap from going crazy with the loneliness. That's the thing that does fer yer—the loneliness. You get to talk aloud to yerself afore yer know it: then you're off your head. Don't I know it? Haven't I seen other chaps like you, chaps who said they'd rather be shot than take up with a native woman, go stark, raving mad?"

Not a day passed but one or another of the police boys, or Holt's cook boy, spoke of the woman Mary, and expressed a wonder that the baas should elect to live alone. And in time these slimy suggestions to seek solace from the loneliness and the dreary monotony of the place finally pierced the armor of Holt's resolutions to live clean. Another of the native police boys stopped on his way to the ford. He reeled drunkenly in his gait and shouted a ribald song. He leered at Holt.

" The baas will soon be glad," he hiccuped. " His hut has been empty too long."

Holt scowled, but made no reply, and the native passed on.

Holt sat for a while in sullen silence, then, rising to his feet, walked to a place which gave him a better view of the trail leading to the ford on the other side of the river.

There he again sat down. His attitude was tense; there was an expression of lustful impatience, tempered by self-disgust, in his eyes.

That morning he had gone into the mess

hut with something approaching hunger. But when Sixpence, his cook boy, came in with the food—the rancid butter, the watered milk, the burned meal—his appetite left him. The sight of Sixpence, naked save for the greasy goatskin about his loins, sickened him.

He had pushed back his chair and left the hut, striking savagely at Sixpence, who sought to learn his intentions. For a long time he had sat on the cot in his sleeping hut, brooding moodily on his " rotten luck." He was unable to look hopefully forward to the future; he was conscious only of the miserable present.

" Sixpence," he called suddenly, and his voice had a strange, harsh note in it. When the native came running to the call Holt continued: " Do you know where the woman Mary lives?"

" Yes." Sixpence grinned widely. " It is only an hour's trek from here—inkosi."

The word " inkosi " came tardily. It seemed as though Sixpence had recognized that Holt had come down to his level; as though the barrier between white and black had been destroyed; as though the white man had forfeited all claim to respect. Holt sensed this, for he hesitated before continuing; and when he did speak it was with a certain tenseness which told of the strain he was undergoing.

" Here is money," he said. " Go and bring her here."

Sixpence hasfily grabbed the money and ran off on his errand. A few minutes later Holt heard him shouting gleefully the news to the native police.

And that was two hours ago.

" They ought to be here soon," Holt muttered.

Now that he had decided on this step, so long considered, he was all impatience. Again he rose to his feet and paced restlessly up and down, his eyes fixed on the trail down which Sixpence and the woman Mary would come.

Then the sound of a woman's voice raised in anger sounded from the trail behind him.

As he turned a strange sight met his eyes.

First came a man, bent almost double by the heavy load he carried on his shoulders. His face, Holt saw, was covered with a long gray beard; he was painfully thin, and his ragged trousers clung to him as a flag—a weather-beaten flag—clings to the pole during the calm which follows a heavy rain.

Behind the man was a woman of astonishing fatness. She was clad in the simple kiltlike skirt of her people; the brawny upper part of her was devoid of clothing. Brass cartridge cases hung from the lobes of her ears.

In her hand she carried a stout stick with which she belabored the shoulders of the man whenever, as frequently happened, he stumbled in his gait. From her mouth issued a constant stream of vituperation, her voice rising at the end of a sentence to a high-pitched scream which could be only likened to the hideous cry of a tree hyrax. Holt found much cause for mirth in the oddly assorted pair. To see a man acting the part of a beast of burden—to see a woman having, so evidently, the upper hand of her spouse—was an entirely new thing in his experience of natives.

But, as he watched, the comedy changed to tragedy. The man suddenly discarded his load, and, running to the bank, leaped into the river just above the ford. Almost on the instant of his impact with the water a monster crocodile slipped quietly off a sand bar and made quickly toward the man. Holt, now thoroughly aroused, seeing that the poor soul could not swim, nor sensed the slinking death that was approaching, kicked off his riding boots and dived to the rescue.

This second splash attracted the attention of two other crocodiles, but it also served to make the first one hesitate before rushing upon its prey. As Holt came to the surface he could see the monster, half submerged, watching his progress with cold, calculating eyes.

Holt was a powerful swimmer, and soon reached the drowning man, seized him by the hair, and began to swim with him toward the bank. If previously Holt had deemed it strange that the man had made no outcry, no attempt to save himself, he would—had he thought of it at all—have

considered it still stranger that the man should now try to avoid being rescued; should struggle to break away fram Holt's grasp.

But, despite the other's struggles, Holt finally gained the shallow waters of the ford and had dragged the man out of the water and halfway up the steep bank before the crocodiles, suddenly sensing that they were balked of their prey, made a concerted rush which carried them out of the water and up the bank to within two or three feet of the men.

So near did they come that Holt was almost nauseated by their foul breath. Then, with a vicious snapping of powerful jaws, they backed into the water and sank slowly from sight.

With a sigh of relief Holt turned to the man he had rescued at the risk of his own life. He was sitting up, regarding Holt with an expression of intense hate. With a start of astonishment it came to Holt that the other was a white man—ragged, unkempt, dirty, a degenerate surely, but still a white man.

Holt gave voice to his surprise. Could he be mistaken?

"A white man!" he gasped. "You are a white man."

"Yes, damn you," snarled the other. "A white man—a 'white kaffir,' some folks call me. What did you want to interfere for? For months, years, I have been trying to get up courage to do what I did to-day." He began to whimper softly.

Holt saw that he was quite old.

"I want to die clean," the man continued. "I wanted to get away from the filth I've been living in, and you, blast your soul, interfere. I haven't got the nerve to do it again. I—"

He stopped short and looked up, terrified, as the fat woman came toward him, the stick raised threateningly in her hand.

"You old fool!" she screamed, totally ignoring Holt. "So you'd try to run away from me, would you? Ingrate! Worthless one! Oh, you pig's offspring!"

She brought the stick down hard upon his shoulders, and he writhed with the pain of the blow.

Holt attempted to check her.

"What do you mean by so treating a white man?"

"White man!" she scoffed. "He's no white man. He's my man—my husband. He's black, same as me. He has lived many years among the people of my kraal. He thinks as we do; he does the things we do; he eats the same food; he shares my hut. Get up, pig!" She prodded the prostrate man with her foot. "We have tarried here too long."

"Yes, O honey bird," mumbled the man. "I hasten to obey, O woman of great sweetness."

He stumbled to his feet, picked up the bundle he had discarded before making his mad plunge into the river, and without further word led the way over the ford. The woman followed closely behind him, and in a few minutes they were both lost to sight in the thick jungle growth.

For a few minutes Holt stood deep in thought on the bank of the river, then ran swiftly to his hut, undressed, and rubbed himself briskly with a clean towel. Regarding his reflection closely in the cracked mirror which hung on the wall, he concluded that he needed a shave. This done, he dressed himself in a clean suit of white duck.

Going to the door of the hut, he blew shrilly on a whistle.

Six police boys came running in response to the signal. Their uniforms were caked with mud and filth; the brass buttons were tarnished and their general appearance was slovenly.

They grinned impudently at him, thinking that he was about to "dash" them—give them presents, perhaps some of the white man's strong drink.

"Attention!" he called out in a barking voice.

Wonderingly they drew themselves up into a semblance of order.

"You are pigs," he said in a slow, cutting voice. "You look like pigs, you have acted like pigs—you are pigs. Jhentsi!" He named the least disreputable one among them.

"Inkosi."

In the title he gave Holt was expressed the respect that a native always gives to a

white man until that white man proves himself unworthy.

A gleam of pleasure passed over Holt's face.

"I am going to make you a corporal, Jhentsi," he said.

"It is well, inkosi," Jhentsi replied, and, scowling intimidatingly at the others. he placed himself at the right of the line.

"You will take these men and tear down the native quarters."

"Inkosi?" Jhentsi was not sure that he had heard correctly.

"It was an order," Holt continued. "It is to be done at once."

"But—but—where shall we sleep, inkosi?"

"Have you and your wives forgotten how huts are built?"

"Nay."

"Then lose no time in building others to take the place of the ones ye destroy to-day. And, say—are there no breakers of the law in all this district of Chimwa? Are there no men who have neglected to pay their taxes? Are there no men who have forgotten to obtain the paper of marriage which the white lord at Bulawayo says they must have before they take a maiden to wife? Are there no men whose dogs run loose, lacking the little brass charm upon their collar?"

"Doubtless there are many such men, inkosi."

"Then send out two men and gather all these lawbreakers to this place. They shall obtain release from punishment by building huts fit for the B. S. A. N. P., and other huts fit for a white man to live in."

"It is well said, inkosi."

"When that is done," continued Holt, "I will find other work which these lawbreakers shall do. A certain swamp I know of shall be drained; they shall aid me to drive the crocodiles from the ford; aye, we will have a great slaying of the slimy 'schelms.'"

As Holt spoke the natives gradually assumed a more soldierly attitude. A certain undefinable "something" about him—something which had been lacking for the past three or four months—forced them to forget everything except that here before them stood a white man—a white man, moreover, whose commands it would be well to obey.

"It is an order," Jhentsi said quietly.

"That is good. To-morrow at sunup there will be drill. See that your uniforms are clean. If I find a speck of dirt upon any one of these men, Corporal Jhentsi, I shall appoint another man in your place. That is all. Ye have my leave to go."

Jhentsi saluted smartly.

"Ri' turrrn!" He shouted the command with a proud consciousness of authority. "Quick—march!"

And so they marched out to begin the work Holt had laid out for them. As Holt, left alone once again, set to work to put his cluttered hut in order, he thought a little of the "white kaffir." He now regarded the timely arrival of that unfortunate man and his black wife as a direct act of Providence.

Then he discarded thoughts of the past in the formulating of plans for the future; of the work he would do in his district—work which he could and would do without the coöperation of the natives. He realized that he would have to work hard in order to make up for the months he had squandered.

As he worked he whistled. He was himself, his true self, once again. Suddenly voices sounded outside the hut—the voice of Sixpence mingled with the voice of the woman Mary.

Holt's whistle stopped short; a dark shadow passed over his face. He had forgotten the woman.

And then Sixpence entered. "Mary is outside," he snickered.

"Say 'inkosi,' when you speak to me!" Holt thundered.

"Yes, inkosi. Pardon, inkosi," stammered Sixpence.

"All right. See that you do not err that way again. Now go to your kitchen and clean it well. In an hour's time I shall come there. If there is any dirt a sjambokking will follow."

"Yes, inkosi, but—"

"And in future," continued Holt, "you will wear these when you serve food. See that you wash them, and yourself, often."

He handed a pair of white trousers and a shirt to the bewildered native.

"Yes, inkosi." Sixpence was anxious to depart. "Shall I tell the woman to come in here?"

"No. Tell her to go back to her hut. I do not wish to see her."

"But, inkosi—"

"Do as I say. There is no need for further speech."

Sixpence departed hurriedly, and Holt heard him deliver the message to the woman.

A moment later Mary burst angrily into the hut.

"What is this, white man?" she demanded. "What is this that your servant tells me?"

Mary spoke in the vernacular. She was far too angry to speak English.

"What did he tell you?" Holt asked gently.

"That you had no need of me. It was a mistake? That fool did not understand your word? Having sent for me, you could not cast me aside. You sent for me, white man, and I was glad to come. You will not beat me, I think, as Baas Searles did."

"Sixpence told you a true thing, Mary; I have no need of you."

Mary laughed shrilly.

"Is this the way of white men? Some beat us; others put us to scorn. I—my people will have none of me; to them I am as one dead, because I have found favor in the eyes of white men. All huts are closed to me. There is no place for me to go. I shall stay here, you fool"—Mary's voice rose to a scream—"until the spirits send you wisdom."

"That they have done already," Holt answered gravely. "You cannot stay here." He turned away from her.

For a moment Mary regarded him with sullen eyes. She seemed to be considering her course—wondering if by further words she could prevail upon him. A little she thought, perhaps—for Mary was not accustomed to being treated so—of working Holt some physical injury. Suddenly she laughed.

"All right!" She spoke her peculiar brand of English now. "I shall go, mister. I do not think you send for me again. If you do so, I shall not come. You have chosen a good way, methinks. And I—I must live alone some little time longer. *Shlahla gaghle*—remain in peace—white man."

"Aye. *Hamba gaghle*—may thy path be smooth," Holt answered as Mary walked swiftly from the hut.

He went to the door and watched her until she disappeared from view down the road leading to the ford.

The sun was shining through a rift in the clouds. Even as he watched the clouds closed in again, but it seemed as though that ray of light was still with him, and, reëntering the hut, he applied himself to his work with renewed zest.

About this time Sergeant Blake left headquarters, a month's trek distant, *en route* for Chimwa.

Blake was under orders to close up the post at Chimwa and to report fully on the condition of the camp in general, and specifically upon the moral condition of Trooper Holt—recommended strongly for a commission.

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The Fur Cloak

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "A Noise in Newboro," "Regular People," etc.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MORNING AFTER.

MYRA'S mechanism—fundamentally a rather precise and reliable affair all around—had long since been set at quarter of eight as the hour for emerging from slumberland. At a quarter of eight, then, she opened her eyes and blinked sleepily—abruptly opened them widely at the first glimpse of her surroundings and sat bolt upright—gasped once in a rather senseless manner, and then sank back upon the thickest, softest pillow she had encountered since leaving home.

She remembered now, of course, although that first second of consciousness had been rather staggering. This was the guest chamber—specifically, the east guest chamber, with beautiful sunshine streaming in through the big bay window of leaded glass—and a very pretty room indeed. It was done in pale blue and old ivory, the furniture itself being in the latter tone; two exquisite Chinese rugs were upon the floor and—h-m! As the doctor himself might have said, it was extraordinary, the unbelievable fact of her being here at all, the incredible manner of her arrival, all of it! Nevertheless, being here, just what did she intend to do next?

Candidly, Myra had not the slightest idea just then. She sat up again and folded her hands, pensively considering the sleeves of the nightgown which the tightlipped Hodge lady had contributed earlier in the morning—a dainty bit of negligee contrived of muslin stiff and thick as cardboard, with an

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 24.

ultrarespectable high-cut neck that would have garroted any one rash enough to fasten the last button.

This was indeed a weird interlude in her conquest of a great city. And yet, while she would hardly have stepped into the muddle with eyes open, she had certainly found some thrills at last. Myra Carson smiled, not prettily as of yore, but grimly and rather angrily. All in all, in one night, they had furnished her nearly enough thrills to compensate her for five dead, discouraged months, and— Oh, this was all rambling, was it not?

Probably no person under the sun would have made her a small loan so gladly as Dr. Warner, elsewhere in the house, should she explain that she needed money to travel hence. She could borrow and go back to her room and continue the hunt for another job. And forever be under suspicion—if this were not too mild a word—in the eyes of Daisy Walsh. And, perchance, be refused her room at any price, did Mrs. Smith choose to put an unworthy construction on her overnight absence. And unquestionably be hounded, if not slaughtered, by the very absurd Arthur Bond, who would return to the house several times to learn if she had reappeared. Arthur was by this time an entirely irresponsible being, frothing at the mouth, stamping about, roaring. How intensely she hated Arthur Bond! Myra reflected, sniffing once and blinking away the sudden swimming effect from her eyes.

And that peaceful and regular procedure meant leaving here meekly—that meant walking out of the place to which she had been dragged by brute force, without having taken a single punitive measure. Her eyes glittered. She'd be hanged if she'd do that! Two or three days ago, all full of kindliness, she might have been capable of such a thing. At present—it may have been that Daisy's doctrine of deliberate unpleasantness really was working in, or it may have been that many queer circumstances had combined to upset Myra's nervous balance a trifle—leaving here without some sort of revenge was a flat impossibility! A dastardly crime had been perpetrated upon her innocent person, at the instigation of some very responsible people; and now she had them in the very hollow of her hand, and she would squeeze and squeeze until Warner was mere pulp and even Westford and his millions began to feel the pressure. Aye, they should pay and pay and pay, until dad's business had capital beyond its wildest dreams and she herself was established forever, and—

Well, not all that, perhaps. But they should pay! Especially Warner. For some reason not quite clear to herself she felt more incensed at Warner than at the actual criminals, big and little. He seemed such a vague, helpless sort of creature! A real man, finding a pretty girl in this plight, would have groveled in the very dirt before her—would have put his last cent and his last ounce of energy at her instant disposal, so that the wrong might be righted at least in part.

Warner, assuming her mentality to be a shade less powerful than that of a young rabbit, had dared bid her forgive and forget and just go home. No, for a day or two at least, she would stay and make life interesting for Warner and for Westford when the partner in crime appeared. It was a reasonably secure hiding place from Arthur Bond, too, until he had cooled down and gone home—and the proprieties were satisfied by the presence of the grim Mrs. Hodge.

Myra leaned back luxuriously. There was a telephone on the stand at her elbow; she gazed absently at it for a time, then she called for the Smith rooming house, and a later demanded speech with Daisy Walsh.

"Who's this?" that young woman asked presently.

"It's Myra Carson, and—"

"Well, kid, y' got some nerve to turn Smitty loose on me!" Daisy exploded softly. "I had this morning's get-away all framed when she come hollering 'telephone' at me!"

"Good gracious! I'd forgotten you were keeping out of her way!" Myra breathed.

"I'll say you had, kid! You ain't so different from the rest, are you, deary? Hook up with the large green bundle—and forget your friends' troubles. What's on your mind now? I thought *you*—"

"Yes, I can guess what you thought—and you're entirely wrong!" Myra put in hastily. "Daisy, will you do something for me?"

"I never went back on a pal yet."

"Then see Mrs. Smith and tell her I've—I've taken a new position, and I'll positively have to have all the little odds and ends that belong to me."

"You mean combs, brushes, files, puffs, grease and so on?"

"Of course. She can hold my trunk, but if you'll pack those other things in my grip and send it up here by express—"

"Yeh! Where's 'here'?"

"Melford Manor, Daisy."

"Aha! Millionaire stuff!"

"Powling Road, I believe they call it, in care of Dr. Warner," Myra pursued.

"Warner—that's his name, is it?"

"No, it's not 'his' name at all, in the sense you mean," Myra snapped. "Will you do that?"

"I said I would. Powling Road—right!"

This conversation Myra cut off rather abruptly. There was an increasing something in Daisy's voice which caused her to flush anew each time she heard it. She arose and gazed at the pretty old ivory dressing table; perhaps she needn't have called Daisy at all. There was a very full assortment of toilet articles provided for the guest of this room. She moved on to the bay window, parting the curtains and looking out into the glorious sunshine; and a small sigh escaped Myra Carson and a dreadful pang of homesickness stabbed through and through her.

There were hills, stretching away—low, rolling hills that reminded her poignantly of the hills up home. There was a sunny peace, a familiar wide, airy freedom about them such as she had not sensed once in five weary months. This dwelling stood on the crest of a ridge; there were gardens before it, very prettily contrived, very dry and barren just now.

Down there, five or six hundred feet away, smoke curled from the red roof of the next house; farther off in the other direction a perfect gem of a little white colonial cottage nestled in a tiny dell; and away off on the opposite ridge, standing well back from the ribbonlike State road, an imposing stucco home met the eye. Nowhere lurked even the hint of a large and unkind city.

She wouldn't go back to the city! No, she would work out her little vengeance here, and then go home—well, for Christmas, at any rate. She had experienced a terrible struggle last week in writing the letter which announced that she couldn't get home for Christmas. Because, be it ever so humble, and so on, there is just one place to be happy, and that place is *home!*

And once there, with dad and mother and the kids, perhaps even with Arthur Bond, restored to reason— Miss Carson started back angrily and turned away from the window. What in the world was the matter with her? Weakening at this stage? She muttered angrily, to herself, at herself, about herself. Two minutes later she laughed aloud and unmusically, and knew with evil satisfaction that she was at least as unpleasant as before.

A small and very uninviting suggestion of frizzling ham floated up from regions below. Myra considered her very plain little serge gown, hanging over the back of the chair; it was well enough at Mrs. Smith's to get into that for breakfast, if breakfast happened to be in sight, but it wasn't at all the sort of morning gown one should wear in an establishment like this, was it? Her eye roamed on, to the slightly opened door of the closet, and widened at the fold of pink and the suggestion of gray taffeta visible there.

There was another woman about the place, eh? Those garments never belonged to the elderly Mrs. Hodge—and Dr. Warner wasn't married. He looked too much the preoccupied bachelor; and, even assuming that he was not, any normal wife would have been visible and audible at the early morning conclave.

Because of the manner of her induction into this household Myra's normally tender conscience would have slumbered sweetly through anything short of grand larceny or premeditated arson. Hence she threw back the closet door and directed a critical eye

upon the line of tidily hung feminine raiment.

It was fluffy and fussy and expensive and correct, all of it. That dainty little pale-blue thing was a perfect dream. Myra, reaching in, picked it forth and shook it out, sighing at first and then scowling. This was the sort of frippery that a crook's womankind could afford—and Dr. Warner was exactly that—while the Myra Carsons, punctilious to a penny, struggled hard to buy one serge dress at fifteen fifty. Ten minutes later she descended the stairs rather airily, wearing the dainty little pale-blue thing.

The perfect dining room at the angle of the foyer was empty, but the table seemed to have been set for two. Beneath the stairs Dr. Warner was speaking at the telephone: "Well, as soon as he comes in—and you must be certain to deliver this message—say to Mr. Westford that he is to call Dr. Warner. Instantly—Yes, *instantly*."

A loud sigh followed the click of the receiver. The girl posed, prettily and insolently, at the foot of the stairs, and waited for Dr. Warner to appear. This he did, his steps dragging, within ten seconds or so; his eyes were upon the floor just then as he said:

"Good morning, Miss Carson. I heard you coming down. I've been trying to get in touch with— Oh, I say! *Here*—you can't wear that thing!"

"No? But I am wearing it, you see."

"I mean, of course, that you mustn't!" the doctor pursued rather wildly. "Not that—not any of those things! Those are my wife's."

"You *have* a wife?"

"Er—very decidedly, *yes!* Absent at the moment, thank Heaven! And she is so extremely particular about her personal belongings." The scientist gasped, and stopped, and then had the temerity to frown heavily. "Look here, young woman, this is really too much of a good thing! I insist that you go up immediately and put on your own gown!"

Myra's head tilted slightly and more insolently.

"Yes? And now that you have insisted?"

"You will—ah—ah—go!" the doctor said weakly.

"Breakfast ready?" she inquired, strolling past him. "I'm starved!"

Behind her sounded one choke, one gurgle, and possibly half of another gasp; then the master of the house appeared to have controlled himself. He was following slowly. He— Why, how nice he could be! He was holding Myra's chair for her now, and when she glanced up, directing a cool nod of thanks at Dr. Warner, she noted that the external evidences of his wrath had vanished and that he was even essaying a palliating smile.

Nevertheless, it was an extremely nervous person who took the opposite chair. He cleared his throat several times; he removed his glasses and polished them, glancing fearfully toward the kitchen door. He executed a visible start as Mrs. Hodge, appearing suddenly with coffeepot in one hand and a platter in the other, stopped short, fastened her thunderstruck, horrified gaze upon Myra, permitted it to move down to her feet and up to her head again, and then said:

"Hah!" as if the last detail of iniquity had been confirmed; and then dropped her voice to a deeper, significant: "Hoh!"

Following this she served breakfast to a silent pair, eyes avoiding both of them so far as possible, at last to shuffle out, muttering, head shaking.

The doctor tried another smile, and it was a sickly thing to see.

"Er—trifle awkward," he observed uncomfortably. "The way Hodge— Oh, you understand!"

"Find it so?" Myra asked serenely. "I don't."

"Possibly it's not nearly so awkward for you as it is for me," the doctor said rather warmly, but immediately he forced a smile so bland that it was almost seductive, and leaned a little nearer to her. "Miss Carson, I think it's high time that you and I—two perfectly right people, if I may put it that way, very oddly thrown together—that we came to an understanding."

"Ah?"

"Just how in the world did you become involved in this, in the first place?"

"How did *you?*" Myra inquired.

"Well, *that* is something I cannot explain."

"Please consider that my answer, too. Is there anything else we need understand?"

There was a little fright in the doctor's eyes as they blinked at her.

"Put it in another way, then," he said suavely. "Let's decide what it's best to do."

"I think I've already decided," Myra said rather irritably. "What's your suggestion?"

"Simply this: this is really no place for you, and it's—ah—very charming to have you here, of course, but if the—ah—neighbors happened to learn of your presence, just to consider one angle, it would reflect most unjustly on you!"

"Oh, you could explain that I was your sister from the West, or your cousin from the South. Something like that?"

Dr. Warner, after the briefest study of her impatient little smile, swallowed twice. "Doubtless, but still the—ah—the possibility of a most unpleasant misconstruction remains. Now, why not do this? Why not let me crank up the car and just take you home? Oh, not without compensation, of course—not that!" he said hastily. "I had thought of begging you to accept—ah—say, two hundred dollars."

"Do you imagine that I am so cheap and unimportant and insignificant that for two hundred dollars—" she began hotly.

"Or more than that! More than that!" the doctor cried. "Shall we say, perhaps, five hundred dollars, Miss Carson? Now, be as honest with yourself as I want you to be with me! Wouldn't that be—ah—fair?" His smile was positively vampish now.

Myra's lips curled most unpleasantly, and she, too, leaned forward. "Doctor," she said earnestly, "you haven't even the smallest conception of where you stand and where I stand. Will you just give me your whole attention for two minutes? Without bothering to guess what I'll accept in the money line, because I shall accept nothing whatever? Thank you! I'm here! I did not want to come, and now that I've been brought here I'm staying. I hate to inconvenience you, but you and your associates have inconvenienced me in the most unthinkable and outrageous way possible. You grasp that?"

"I—yes!"

"I have wonderful material for civil actions against both of you. A word from me, and you'll both be subject to criminal prosecution as well. Still more, I have an extremely muscular father and an equally muscular fiancé, both of whom are fond of me, I think. Another word from me, and they'll take *you* and so alter your general appearance that not one of your friends will recognize you for months. I'm not threatening anything; I'm just explaining," she said sweetly. "You're really not in any position to dictate to me, are you?"

"Not—at present!" the doctor confessed thinly.

"I'm not just myself these days; that is, I'm rather tired and irritable and unreliable—likely to fly into a really irresponsible passion if I'm annoyed too much, and so on. And unless this tiresome discussion about whether I will or will not go away, or whether I will or will not accept money—unless all that stops I'm very much afraid that something will snap, you know, and that I'll leave here, just as I am, and run down to that pretty house with the red roof, ask to use their telephone, plant all the seeds of the village scandal of all time, start the authorities in your direction and—Good gracious, you must have *some* imagination!"

"I have a—a very vivid imagination, Miss Carson," passed the scientist's pale lips.

"Then I needn't explain further? I'm staying?"

"Very evidently."

Myra sighed gently. He was indeed suffering!

"And meanwhile, I'm boss here!" she said.

"In what way?"

"In every way there is to be boss!"

With a ghastly little smile the doctor nodded.

"It would seem so, Miss Carson."

The guest of the house sighed pleasantly

and returned to her coffee. Dr. Warner, whose expression resembled more than anything else an incipient case of mania, played with a fragment of roll and blinked—cleared his throat and opened his lips—thought better of it and went on playing with his roll, the while directing at his guest scared and darting glances.

After several of these, though, hope began to kindle in his eye. Whatever her attitude, the young person certainly looked very pretty and very harmless. Once upon a time the doctor had been quite a devil among the ladies, able to sway them by his personal charms. So the hope grew, and the doctor apparently took to planning a new and different attack.

Which was largely because he had no means of looking into Myra's brain. That young woman dropped her napkin and smiled faintly.

"We may as well start?" she suggested.

"*Start?*" the doctor all but shouted.

"Doing what I want done around the house here, I mean. I like the general plan of your place, but there are a lot of things I *don't* like; and since I'm staying here I may as well have things as they please me?"

The doctor, his troubled eyes having studied her through the big glasses for a little, shook his head.

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about," he said.

"No? You'll understand better when we've been acquainted longer," she answered, moving languidly into the living-room. "These pictures, for the first item. They're horrors—perfect horrors! They look like heirlooms of some family that owned an amateur Rosa Bonheur!"

"They're just that—my wife's family. Not art works, I admit, but—"

"Well, don't bother explaining. Just take them down and pile them somewhere out of sight!"

"*What?*"

"Yes! Every one of them!"

Briefly, the scientist stood quite rigid before her; then his color mounted angrily.

"My dear Miss Carson," he began energetically, "a joke's a joke, but—"

"I know, but this isn't a joke!" the guest said dangerously. "This is a serious and earnest business. I'm living here, and it's only decent that the place should be rearranged so that I'm as contented and comfortable as possible. Will you take down those atrocities or will you not?"

"Most emphatically, I will *not!*" cried the doctor. "I'll be eternally blasted if I'll—where are you going, Miss Carson?"

"Down to the neighbor's, of course. You're probably able to cut off this telephone, if I try to get the sheriff's office on it. You might even attack me; you seem to have a terrible temper—shouting at me like that. I'll be back when the sheriff—"

"Miss Carson!" choked Dr. Warner.

"Well?"

"Will you—will you remain, please. I—I think you're in control."

"You're frightfully quick at grasping things, aren't you?" the guest said acidly.

So, for another short period, they faced one another steadily; but this time the doctor attempted no soul-penetrating. Slowly, steadily, quite visibly, he wilted. He nodded in a horrified, dreamlike way, squinting queerly at Myra as if still quite certain that this was no more than a nightmare from which he must presently emerge.

"Which of them—shall I take down first?" his humble voice inquired, as from a great distance.

"Oh, you may as well begin with that one of the horse trying to drown himself in the little water pail," she said.

CHAPTER X.

REARRANGEMENTS.

THE doctor winced.

"Miss Carson, *that* picture—"

"I know—it's loaded down with sacred associations and all that sort of thing, of course," Myra said impatiently. "I'm not a bit sentimental. Will you start, please?"

"Yes," shuddered Dr. Warner, as he stepped to a chair and lifted the masterpiece from its nail.

He set it down, face against the wall, and glanced hopefully at his guest.

"I—I assume all this is really happen-

ing," he said, somewhat pitifully. "I confess that some of these things are a bit trying, but one has to have some pictures. How would it be if we—er—just selected the worst and removed them?"

"It would be quite all right if you were consulting your own taste, but you're not. You're consulting mine. Go right along the line, if you will, and make a clean sweep of it."

The scientist moaned softly and dragged his chair to the next sacrifice, while she settled herself comfortably and looked on with critical and unsmiling approval. One by one the little paintings, which actually were not so very bad, left their hooks, were lowered to the floor with the utmost care and left reposing mournfully against the wall.

And now, to be sure, they were all down, and the apartment, if a trifle bare, looked more chaste and artistic. The doctor dabbed at his forehead and smiled forlornly —and the far door opened a trifle and Mrs. Hodge spoke:

"Your study's all dusted and aired now, sir."

"I—very well. I shall not go to work just yet."

"It's past nine, sir. You gave me the strictest orders to have your study dusted as early as possible."

"I know I did. I've—er—changed my mind. That is all, Mrs. Hodge."

The elder lady, however, had stepped into the living room; she stood looking about with dumfounded, incredulous eyes.

"*You're* not housecleaning, doctor?"

"I'm just taking down a few pictures!" Warner snapped.

"For good?"

"Ah—certainly!" said the doctor, as his eye caught Myra's. "You may go, now, Hodge."

"Well, excuse my saying it, sir," said the housekeeper, and failed to budge, "but those pictures are such favorites of Mrs.—"

"Mrs. Hodge!" barked the doctor. "You're an old and faithful and valued servant, but be so good as to remember that I'm quite capable of managing my own house. Don't take liberties."

"Hoh!" mused the lady, and fastened her dark gaze upon Myra. "I'd be the last to do that, I'm sure, but there's times —all these are coming down because the young lady wishes it? You're taking orders from her now, sir?"

"*Hodge!*" thundered Dr. Warner.

"Well, don't run away like that, Mrs. Hodge," Myra said sweetly. "Something has to be done with these pictures."

"Yes! Er—put them in the large closet under the stairs!" the doctor said hastily.

"Isn't there a cellar?" the guest inquired.

"Of course, but the cellar—"

"Put them in the cellar, Mrs. Hodge!" Miss Carson directed, with a delicate shiver. "That's farther off and more appropriate."

"Well, I must say—" the housekeeper began.

"The cellar, Hodge!" choked Dr. Warner.

A moment it seemed that the elder woman was about to refuse her obedience. Then, tenderly, she took to bunching the little pictures and carrying them out. Once she paused, to gaze at Dr. Warner and shake her head, to part her lips and then shake her head again, finally to walk out with the last lot.

"Not a bit of discipline or respect?" Myra commented, frowning. "I shouldn't care to have a woman like that around."

"But my dear young lady!" the doctor cried in sudden horror. "I can't get rid of Hodge, you know. She was my wife's nurse and—"

"Well, never mind. We'll keep her for the present, of course," said Myra. "Let's see what else this room's crying for in the way of changes."

"*I'd* suggest — it really looks so much better without the pictures—leaving it just as it is now!"

"Naturally; that's because you're used to it all and you lack the artistic eye. It 'll look better still before I've finished, I assure you," Miss Carson said crisply. "Now, *that* chair and *that* chair, the two big ones beside the table, are all out of harmony, and so is that hideous rug. Let's eliminate them next."

"But those particular things—"

" Everything I suggest wounds your feelings, doesn't it?"

" Candidly, yes! Because you seem to have a fiendish intuition in selecting—ah—articles endeared to us by—"

" But you *are* going to remove them? You're not going to force me to—well, to take measures?"

" No. I'm not. Indeed, I am not!" the doctor muttered thickly, as he laid hands on the first of the chairs. " Where shall I put them?"

" Gracious, I don't care! Just so that they're out of sight, you know," Myra said carelessly, and patted her hair. " If there's a woodshed, I'd suggest that?"

She hummed thoughtfully while the doctor rolled out the chairs, and, catching a sharp sigh, folded the square of Oriental carpet and trotted out with that as well. These at least seemed to have attained the respectable obscurity of the deep hall closet, for the doctor was just emerging from that recess when Myra Carson strolled into the foyer.

" As to the hall here!" she mused.

" There's really nothing—"

" I suppose there hasn't been a vase like that on a newell post in a civilized home since Andrew Jackson's time," said the guest, lifting it down. " Throw the thing out, will you, doctor?"

" I'll—put it out of sight."

" And that awful hatrack, too! How did that ever escape the wood box? Why not take it and chop it up now. That would end the temptation to put it back later."

She waited, ostensibly expecting the scientist to produce an ax and set about the demolition of his own furniture. She glanced at him when he failed to move, and she was rather puzzled. Into Dr. Warner's really intelligent eye the light of reason was struggling to return; there was also a suspicion of grim humor.

" Before I—ah—do that, will you come into the living room again?" he said quietly, leading the way.

" I'm through with the living room for the present," Myra objected, although she followed.

" I understand, but I'd like to talk things over quietly. Will you sit down?"

" I will not!" snapped the guest. " Ever since your assistants kidnaped me last night somebody's been asking me to sit down and talk it over quietly. If you're so enamored of quiet things, you should conduct your affairs in a quiet, rational way. You haven't done that! You've chosen to plunge into the wildest kind of crime—and there's really nothing at all to be talked over quietly!"

" My dear Miss Carson—" the doctor began very blandly, but with the smallest tremor.

" You're trying to soothe me now?"

" Perhaps."

" I wouldn't, if I were you. It irritates me horribly, being soothed!" the strange guest snapped. " And it takes my mind off the task of putting this house into some sort of habitable shape. Shall we just stick to our muttons or shall I—er—let go of myself, as it were?"

" Whatever else you do, don't do that!" the doctor cried. " What—ah—what were you about to suggest, Miss Carson?"

His eyes sought the door, as if he contemplated headlong flight.

" I've been thinking of my own room, this last minute or two," she said, puckering her brows. " It's ghastly, isn't it?"

" In what way?" the doctor asked thinly.

" The furniture, of course! It's ugly. The very sight of it gives one the horrors!"

All things notwithstanding, Dr. Warner flushed angrily.

" My dear young woman," he said, " that bedroom set of old ivory enamel was made not ten years ago in France by one of the greatest masters that ever—"

" Yes, but if it doesn't please *me* what earthly interest do you expect me to find in its pedigree? It's all right, doubtless, if one fancies that sort of thing. *I* don't! *I* loathe every stick of it! So it will have to go. I want mahogany in there; I love mahogany!"

" Well, d'ye expect me to race down to the city and buy you a mahogany bedroom suite?" the doctor cried wildly. " D'you expect me to spend two or three thousand dollars I—I haven't got, simply because you can't appreciate—"

Here, wisely enough, he bit off his words.

"It might be a rather cheap investment, I should think," she said. "However, I'm not unreasonable, I hope. Isn't there a set in the house here?"

"No, not that you could have. The only mahogany bedroom furniture in the place is in our room," the doctor said unguardedly.

"Is it? Let's have a look at it. It may do, you know."

She rose, moving rather majestically to the door. Dr. Warner bounced after her, hands outstretched.

"Here! Hold on!" he cried. "Don't you understand that—that that's *our* room? Mrs. Warner's and mine, I mean! I—confound it! I won't permit you to drag me there!"

"It isn't conceivable that you're quibbling at the mere appearance of the thing, is it?" Myra asked, frostily. "You, an individual who hires thugs to drag a girl to his house at two o'clock in the morning, bound and gagged? Oh, that's too absurd! Where's the room?"

"But what I've tried to tell you—tried repeatedly—is that I disclaim, absolutely, any responsibility for your being here or for the manner in which you were brought here!" the doctor protested. "I—Miss Carson! One moment!"

Myra, however, was nearly at the head of the flight by this time. The doctor scampered up after her, panting. The guest gazed around coldly; there was a door over there which must lead to the big room at the front of the house. She advanced and opened it, to pause in the doorway and examine what was really a very handsome bedroom. She turned presently, to find Dr. Warner making queer little gesticulations toward her and still trying to speak.

"It could be better!" she reported.

"You—don't like it?" the doctor whined hopefully.

"Not particularly. Still — rather than seem nasty and hypercritical, you know—it will do. Don't gape at me like that, please."

"But—"

"I want that yellow stuff taken out of my room and I want this mahogany put in its place, and I want you to do it at once!" the girl commanded. "That's explicit enough, isn't it?"

"Ex—explicit as it is impossible!" the doctor exploded, and it seemed that he was losing his grip upon himself. "I—*no!* I'm damned if I'll do that! I—why, everything else apart, I haven't the most remote idea how one moves a bed! I've never even seen one taken down! I—"

His furious gaze met Myra Carson's strange, strange stare, with its crooked little smile and its glinting eye. He cooled almost instantly.

"You could learn how it's done, couldn't you?" Miss Carson purred.

"Probably!" breathed the doctor.

"And you don't really refuse?"

"I—no. That—that was a mere slip of the tongue!" the scientist said, bitterly, as he trudged into the big, bright room.

Mrs. Hodge materialized at the stairhead.

"You're moving beds?" she queried raspingly.

"I am putting this suite in — in Miss Carson's room and—taking hers in here, I think!" the doctor mumbled. "Will you help?"

"Has she put such a spell on you—"

"Will you help?" pleaded the doctor. "I don't know how it's done!"

Something about him must have touched the housekeeper. Lips tight shut, eyes bulging angrily, she stamped to his side; with no single word of further comment she went about the task, directing the doctor, when his aid became necessary, by eloquent grunts and sharp gestures.

Mattress and spring were lifted off; a series of scrapes and squeaks and small gasps, and the bed came down. Hands trembling with suppressed indignation, Mrs. Hodge cleared bureau and dressing table; casters squealing, his numbed feet tripping over rugs now and then, Dr. Warner staggered back and forth with load after load, now pushing, now carrying an armful; the while Myra, apparently rather bored, perched prettily in the window seat at the corner of the hall and waited impatiently while her gentle will was wrought. And now beautiful ivory furniture was scraping past her,

headed in the other direction, and in the guest chamber Mrs. Hodge, who had reached the stage of audible muttering, shook out sheets and patted down pillows.

And at last the whole transfer had been completed, and without one single comment the housekeeper thudded down the stairs and disappeared.

Dr. Warner, very moist and somewhat soiled, sadly rumpled and still shaking a little from the unaccustomed exertion, stumbled to Myra Carson, in the window seat, and stood before her and—well, what was the matter with him now? A crazy smile flickered about his lips and vanished again; several times he nodded a strange, voiceless appeal at Myra, vainly clearing his throat. Suddenly, then, his hands were thrust out toward her, and with a queer little cry Dr. Warner had dropped to his knees!

"I—I don't know the purpose of it, but I can't stand any more of it!" he cried brokenly. "I surrender! I can't stand any more!"

"*What?*"

"No, I can't! I cannot! This — this was to have been one of the biggest days of my life! This—"

"Surely, you're not blaming *me* if it lacks interest?" Myra asked.

"I mean work—work! I had planned to start before nine this morning and work out the whole — I — woman!" the doctor gurgled, and clasped his hands pitifully before her. "What 'll you take to quit now and go away forever?"

"I don't wish—"

"Wait! I mean real money — cash money! Every cent of it that I can raise by begging or borrowing or even stealing! Yes, it's worth the risk of stealing! So, what 'll you take? What's your price, Miss Carson? You must have a price!"

A strange, broken figure it was, indeed, with its clasped hands waving. The girl, however, regarded it with unruffled calm and no smallest hint of human sympathy.

"Must I? Well, I haven't," she said. "I'd be awfully grateful, though, if you'd control that silly hysteria. It's distracting when one's trying to think!"

The hands unclasped, fluttering aimlessly downward. Nature, as it appeared, pulled out the last supporting prop; rather suddenly Dr. Warner sat upon the floor and turned upward his fascinated eyes.

"You're—trying to think?" he whispered.

"Of course."

"What are you—trying to think about —now?"

"About the new decorations up here," Myra said pensively.

"*Huh?*" gasped the stricken man. "Can't you work this—this mania out on mere furniture? You're not contemplating any paper-hanging?"

"Why not?"

"Because *that is* impossible!" the doctor protested huskily and struggled back to his feet, thereafter to totter and sway rather dizzily.

The guest of the house merely eyed him coldly.

"You'd hardly expect a fastidious, sensitive person to tolerate all this depressing gray stuff on the walls, would you?" she asked. "I'm both fastidious and sensitive, you know. Or perhaps you don't know yet. At any rate, I want this hall done in—yes, in a very delicate blue. We'll have the ceiling brought down about another foot and tinted—um. The same blue, perhaps, or a shade lighter?"

"Yes," said the doctor.

"And then my own room. I think we'd better do that first and get the mess out of the way, don't you?"

"Yes!" said the doctor.

"That's rather expensive paper, isn't it?"

"Yes!"

"We'll see if we can't find some still more expensive paper. Something in a very quiet, rich, restful dull gold tone. That's wonderful, you know, if you hit on just the right cream tint for the ceiling."

"Oh, yes," the doctor almost smiled.

There ensued another of those queer little intervals of mutual staring, in which the pair took measure of one another. Myra, without altering her unpleasant little smile, grew suddenly and distinctly puzzled. There was a new quality to Dr. Warner's expression, one that she had not seen be-

fore. It was almost an aura of self-confidence. Strength was returning to him, which was all wrong. Or perhaps he was surrendering to the inevitable and trying to do it gracefully?

At all events, grim and complete resignation was in his eye. He bowed his well-informed head.

"Very well," Miss Carson," he said quietly. "It's a trifle inconvenient and expensive, but what has to be has to be, I suppose. As to the other rooms?"

"I'll decide about them later."

"You wish work started at once?"

"Naturally."

"And you'll be so good as to instruct the workmen yourself, Miss Carson?" the doctor asked further.

"I should prefer to do that, of course."

Sighing, the doctor bowed his head again. And there was no simulation of humility here, Myra concluded; this was the real thing. Dr. Warner had dropped into the category of beaten men.

"I will go and telephone for the workmen immediately, Miss Carson," he said in the same low voice.

Head bent even lower, he shuffled past her and down the stairs!

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE JOB.

SHOULDERS bent, the battered scientist moved to the lower floor, turned to the rear, opened a door, sighed loudly. For an instant Myra caught the suggestion of book shelves along a wall, indicating doubtless that this was the aired and dusted study; then the door swung after Dr. Warner, and the latch clicked softly.

She still stared at the door, steadily and absently, for the best part of a minute. The oddest little depression was stealing over her, bringing with it a sensation of satiety. For no plain reason the memory of her very first party floated back—an occasion whereupon a too energetic hostess had kept things moving at such a lively pace that by nine o'clock the then diminutive Myra Carson had longed for the restful solitude of her own little bed. Myra Carson frowned out of the window. That was it, fast enough; the connection was strong and direct. It seemed undeniable that, after the most hectic twelve hours of her existence, she was turning sane again. She moved restlessly into the guest chamber and looked about. Gentle hysteria shook her for a moment at the thought of the laboring doctor—and died out again with the sudden weak, dwindling effect of a pricked balloon.

Myra herself sighed twice, once lightly, once heavily, for she was in the bay window again and looking out at the homelike hills. There was something terribly normal and steadying about that rolling country; there was something which caused her to lean her head against the casement and permit herself even a third sigh—something usual and rational and all out of harmony with the mad performance in this house. In the way of punishing Dr. Warner she had had about enough. As to punishing Westford and his aids for the real outrage, dad would attend to that. It was just the sort of job that dad would grip with both big hands, that he would sail straight through with all flags flying, and a mass of floating wreckage in his wake. And when he had quite finished it, Myra fancied, the damage would have been more physical than financial, because where his eldest daughter was concerned at least Mr. Carson was a distinctly elemental person.

Myra yearned for Arthur Bond, in a hurt and sickened way, but she yearned for her father just now with a yearning that was almost past endurance. She wanted to go home. That was the beginning and the end of it. She was merely a small-town person who had contrived to cram in a little extra education and thereby had overestimated her own capabilities; and all she wanted now was to go back and take the once suggested job in dad's office at half the present girl's salary. The present girl didn't need the money, anyway; her father was prosperous and—

"I beg pardon!" Mrs. Hodge said grimly, having entered without undue commotion.

"Oh!" said Miss Carson.

"Might I have a word with you, miss—It *is* miss?"

"It is!" Myra snapped. "Apparently, you might. Well?"

"I'd like to ask one question."

"Do so."

"You're staying here indefinitely with the doctor?"

"Just what do you mean by that? You know quite well how I came to be here." Myra bristled.

"I've seen 'em do queerer things than that—queerer things than that!" the lady stated enigmatically. "I'm asking this question for my own information. You're staying?"

"As long as it pleases me!"

"And pleases him, and his wife don't—" the housekeeper began, and shut her teeth on the words. "It ain't for me to make any comments, I suppose. I've took care of Miss Helen since she was a little baby—the doctor's wife, that is, as you doubtless know—and I've always considered him a proper and decent man. A very fine and upright man, as they go, and the best of 'em ain't none too good. But *this*— Oh, it ain't for me to make any comments!"

"Then don't make any," said the girl harshly. "What else do you want?"

The thick-set woman straightened up and looked her over, blackly and meditatively. "Hoh!" said she, as she turned away. "I want nothing else."

And she thumped to the doorway, and there she paused again, for one final, long, up and down survey of Miss Carson. "Hoh!" said Mrs. Hodge, as she drew the door after her.

A pleasant person, Miss Carson reflected rather hotly. A foul-minded old fool, too, since she was perfectly aware of the manner of Myra's arrival. She— Why, how dared she?

Myra slipped down from the window seat and started after her—and thought better of it and returned to the study of her hills. Very likely, if one understood the queer and suspicious workings of her mentality, Mrs. Hodge had justification enough. Only—if the situation seemed so dark to the fully informed housekeeper, in just what light would Myra appear if it became known to outsiders? She shuddered; she fancied that she would change back to her own serge gown now, and let Dr. Warner drive her to town.

And that, as Daisy Walsh would have said, simply meant letting him and his pals get away with it all. Myra's anger welled up again abruptly. Her head was clear, and harbored no illusions as to what would happen once the doctor was comfortably rid of her.

One can do much without money, and a great deal more with it. Five minutes after she had parted company with Dr. Warner he and Westford and any one else concerned would doubtless swear quite cheerfully that they had never laid eyes on her before. It was not impossible that, should she persist in pushing the matter, they'd have her committed as a lunatic or prosecuted for blackmail, or something like that.

So her further dealings in this house would probably be limited to whatever small amusement she could find in binding Dr. Warner to the complete and unnecessary renovation of his home—and after that she'd save his reason by departing. And if ever, in all her later life, any individual or group of individuals offered her a wonderful fur cloak, or suggested that she ride in any automobile whose owner and driver she had not known intimately for at least ten years, then and in that instant Miss Carson would turn and run and begin screaming, and would so continue running and screaming until whatever community should witness the occurrence was roused to the very last man, woman and child. Really, it was the only safe thing to do.

Speaking of automobiles, one had arrived at the house a moment back, had it not? Myra bent forward. She could not see the front of the home from this point, but the sound of brakes had filtered into her meditations a little while ago? Ah, yes, and there were voices downstairs now. Despite a slowly thickening gloom, Miss Carson smiled a little.

She seemed to have started quite an excitement; three or four voices were mumbling and babbling all together. And that little turmoil died down to a rumble which

lasted for two or three minutes. Then steps came upon the stairs, and, presently, a humble little knock upon her own door.

"Come in!"

"The—ah—paperhangers," Dr. Warner announced blandly.

They followed him as he entered—and Myra, who had been upon the point of plunging into orders and instructions of the most expensive and annoying kind, found herself momentarily speechless. She had expected—well, what had she expected? Just ordinary paperhangers, of course—rather dull and conventional-looking workmen, doubtless drilled by Dr. Warner into dissuading her from such plans as threatened utter bankruptcy.

Whereas the shorter of these two men looked altogether too intelligent to be a manual worker of any sort. His chubby face was freshly shaven; his gray eye was keen and sparkling, flashing at Myra for an instant through rimless glasses, flashing away to an inspection of the ceiling. He wore white overalls, but—so did the other man, for that matter, and he was just as unusual. He wore a very carefully trimmed beard, and his hands were white and fine—almost as fine and soft as those of the shorter person. He frowned annoyedly at everything in sight.

"The—ah—paperhangers!" Dr. Warner announced again.

"They don't look—" escaped Myra.

"Like paperhangers? Probably not. We have a most intelligent class of labor in this vicinity," the doctor pursued quite blithely. "Now, if you'll just tell them what you want done, Miss Carson."

"Why, we're the boys that 'll do it right up to the handle for you!" said the fine voice of the shorter man as he stared fixedly at Myra. "What 'll it be, lady? This room?"

"And the hall."

"Yes, ma'am," echoed the short man, and whipped out a spotless morocco notebook and a gold pencil, while Myra studied his very fine, very immaculate shirt sleeve. "Something in a nice tan for in here?"

"The most expensive thing you can find—yes," said Miss Carson.

"Ah—just *why* do you wish it expensive?" The bearded laborer smiled seductively.

"Is that for you to ask?" queried Miss Carson.

"In a way—possibly no," smiled the bearded one. "But Dr. Warner is a very old pa—that is to say, he is one of our oldest customers, and we feel obliged—"

"To consult him? You needn't in this case. I'm the one to be satisfied. Just bring me the sample books, and I'll make the selections. The price is no object!"

"None, eh?" said the shorter man.

"None! Have you the sample books?"

"Did you—er—bring the sample books, Smith?" queried the short man.

"They're at my—they're at our shop, Brown," responded the bearded person, whose eyes had hardly left Miss Carson.

An astonishing little halt came to the conversation. The bearded workman nodded ever so faintly at his partner. Dr. Warner, looking from one to the other, flushed slightly. The short man cleared his throat.

"We'll get 'em and let the lady look 'em over," he stated. "That's all for now."

"You're not going to measure off the walls, or anything like that?" Myra asked curiously.

The shorter man paused in his trip to the door.

"Why, lady, when fellers have been in the business as long as we have, we just take one look at a room and we can tell you to an inch how much paper she needs."

"Ah? And how much does this room need?"

"Just about as much as she's got now!" the shorter man concluded hastily and kept on toward the hall.

"I'll take them down and—ah—get their estimates," said the scientist, heading in the same direction. "You'll just wait here?"

The bearded one, perhaps a timid soul, seemed unduly anxious to follow. As a cluster the trio passed through the door; as a group they huddled directly to the stairs and down them—and Myra stood gazing after them with parted lips. For what in the world was all this? Who were they? Why— She stepped into the corridor softly.

Down in the study, the door swung after the three. Their behavior was most peculiar. The shorter paperhanger threw up his hands and laughed gently.

"Some kid!" said he.

Dr. Warner ignored him for the moment, facing the bearded person.

"Well?" he queried.

"Well what?"

"Have I got a crazy woman on my hands, doctor?" the scientist inquired.

"You have not!" snapped the bearded person. "That is to say, I'm not an alienist, and I haven't had her under observation. You understand that. She may possibly have some obscure form of mania, but I doubt it like the very devil. I'll say from every surface indication that she's an extremely bright young woman—much brighter than you are, Henry."

"I'm not a young woman, Frank," Dr. Warner said tartly.

"No, and you're not bright, either," the apparent physician said, with growing wrath. "I think you're growing stupid."

"But—"

"Remarkably clever inspiration, dragging us here like this, eh? When Stanford ought to be on his way to the city, and I've got a pneumonia case waiting for me! Astoundingly clever. And it deceived the young woman, did it not? She accepted us as paperhangers immediately she saw the white overalls. Pah!"

"Look here, Manning—"

"Look here be damned!" barked the physician. "I've known you for twenty years, Warner, and I've never asked a detail of your personal life. I've not been interested. I'm not now. Your affairs are your own—God help you."

Dr. Warner caught his breath. "I sent for *you*—"

"To find out if there was a chance of—confound it, I will not mince words!—chance of getting rid of your young friend by having me pronounce her a lunatic! Well, there isn't! She's not crazy! That's my professional verdict without sufficient evidence one way or the other, but I'll stake my reputation on it. Now, is there anything more you want of me? I don't appreciate being dragged into this affair."

"Only if—if you'll keep up the illusion by waiting and leaving with Stanford," the scientist said faintly. "Stanford!"

"Aha?" said the shorter man, and cocked his head roguishly.

"What have you to say?"

"How'd you get her here, in the first place?"

"I didn't get her here!" Dr. Warner snapped. "I've already told you that I'm not at liberty to give a single detail of her coming. I've asked you to believe me."

"Ye-ah!" said the short man.

"Well? What have you to suggest?"

"Henry," the short man said, "all I can suggest in a case like this—all I can do—is to point one extended forefinger in your direction, thus, and rub it with the other, thus, meanwhile saying in an impressive undertone: shamey, shamey!"

"Stop your damned comedy!" cried Dr. Warner.

"This isn't comedy, I assure you," said Stanford. "It's merely an attempt to give a light touch to a mighty unpleasant matter."

"Then you think what—what Manning, here, thinks?"

"If you'll just come clean with me, Henry, I may think something else," the short man said quietly enough. "Make a clean breast of the whole business, and I'll do everything I can to help you. Stick to this fool mystery, and I can't do anything. Girl's here—peach of a girl, too—and we're asked to believe that an angel brought her in a basket or she just materialized, to your tremendous astonishment and horror! Bunk!"

"George—"

"Wait, Henry. Don't be an ass. Give me the right of this and let me do whatever is to be done. Good Lord, man! You're not the first model husband in history to miss his step, you know! There's nothing so dumfoundingly original about this stunt of yours that—"

"George, let *me* interrupt!" Dr. Warner cried hoarsely. "You've known me—you have been my personal attorney—for twenty years at least! You *know* me—that's what I'm trying to say."

"Nah, Henry—nah!" said the attorney,

and waved a cynical hand. "Never know a man till he's dead. That's sound in your case as it ever was."

"But—"

"No, you don't, Hank! Then you count up his widows and you get his number! Been through it too many times to be fooled much, I have, you know. Not that I'm not astonished at *you*, of course. I've always—everybody has—looked on you as the most devoted and highly moral old egg in the whole universe. Infernal fool you are, too, I'll say quite bluntly. Man never had a nicer wife or a nicer little home than you have right here. Why—"

"Stop it! D'ye hear? Stop it!" Dr. Warner roared.

"All right. It's none of my business, of course. Only, if you'll just shake off that extreme reticence, Hank, and let me know where we stand— Say, I wouldn't snort like that, either. She'll hear you and come down to see if we're killing you. She'll—"

"She has already heard most of it!" Myra said, very crisply indeed, from the doorway.

Three gentlemen turned as one. They were rather startled-looking gentlemen, too, as well they might have been, at the sight of this particular young woman. Her eyes were large and they snapped; her hands were clenched, and her cheeks were very pale.

"I have heard, and I think that it is high time the truth were told," she pursued. "I wish to say—"

"*Don't!*" burst from the very depths of Dr. Warner's being.

"I mean to tell nothing more than the truth."

"But, don't you see, you can't do that! You can't possibly do that! If you do that it may ruin me absolutely—absolutely to the very last penny! You'll involve—" Dr. Warner pleaded wildly.

"Any one involved will have himself to thank for it," she replied bitterly. "Doctor—you're a physician, aren't you?—I—"

"I am. And I'm not a confessor in an affair of this character, and you don't wish to tell *me* anything about it, because I refuse to listen to one word," the medical man replied hotly, meanwhile kicking his way out of the overalls and snatching up his ordinary coat and hat. If there's one kind of muddle I decline flatly to be mixed up in, it's this kind."

"And anyway—and anyway—" Dr. Warner gasped.

"Let me tell you, then?" Myra snapped at the attorney. "I—"

"You needn't tell me, young woman!" Stanford grinned significantly. "I'm a hardened old bird—been in the law for twenty-five years or more—and I know all the variations and—er—extenuating circumstances by heart, my dear." And then he stepped briskly out of his own overalls and directly to Miss Carson; and viewing the determination writ large in every line of his shirt-sleeved figure, Dr. Warner seemed almost to take heart.

"Miss Carson, I think Henry said your name was?" said the lawyer. "All affairs of this kind can be reduced to their lowest terms in short order and without hysteria."

"What?"

"You're here! That's our first premise. Old Henry, over there, appears to have changed his mind somehow, and he doesn't want you here. That's our second. And you refuse to go, which is our third. So we have all the elements of the case, and all we need now is the solution, and that's easy. My dear young lady, will you here and now accept one thousand dollars and disappear forever?"

Perchance, had he not winked, Miss Carson might have blasted him with a few terrible words and then have gone away from that place.

But he did wink, and it was a wink so eloquent and withal so very offensive that something within Miss Carson tightened suddenly, causing her eyes to blaze and two red spots to appear upon her pallid cheeks. Obvious decency, perfectly palpable respectability, moral soundness that should have been the first legible thing on her countenance—these counted for nothing at all. Doctor and lawyer, called in by the imbecile Warner to aid him in his extremity, had glanced at the merest circumstances and condemned her, without trial, without arraignment, without consenting to hear one word of her side of the case. In which

they were just like Arthur Bond—and doubtless just like the rest of their accursed sex.

"I will not," Miss Carson rather surprised herself by saying.

"Ah? Two thousand, then?"

"No!"

"Indeed? How about—skipping at once to the very outside limit, young lady—how about three thousand dollars?"

"Stanford!" Dr. Warner gasped. "Who—pays this money?"

"*Who?*" the lawyer roared. "You do."

"But you know my affairs perfectly. You know how completely I'm tied up. You know—"

"Are you suggesting that *I* loan you something to drop into this kitty?" the attorney demanded with some asperity. "Because I can't."

"No, but—three thousand dollars—"

"Well, on an extreme pinch, you can raise that much, can't you?" Stanford asked contemptuously.

"On an extreme—an extreme—" Dr. Warner faltered.

The lawyer sniffed.

"Worst thing about pipers is that they do have to be paid," he said acidly, "and it seems to me it might be sporting, now you've gotten yourself into it— Well, that is not my affair, either. How about it, young lady? You've heard the heart to heart discussion between lawyer and client. It's genuine, I assure you. Will you take three thousand and go?"

"No!"

Mr. Stanford was a man of brisk action. Already Dr. Manning had snorted his last disgusted snort and made his way from the house. Mr. Stanford picked up his hat and coat and started for the door.

"Guess you're stuck, Henry," he said shortly. "By-by!"

CHAPTER XII.

CALMER VIEWS.

"GEORGE!" exclaimed Dr. Warner. "Don't go away like that, without—"

"Go away be blowed!" snapped the attorney, as he passed out. "You get your mind made up to telling me the full and true details of this case, and perhaps I shall be able to suggest something."

"But, George—"

"No! I can't suggest one blooming thing until I have some intelligent facts to work on, and until you give me those I refuse even to discuss it," the attorney rapped out. "You think it over and call me up when I get home to-night, if you've decided to 'fess up. I'll probably make the six ten."

And here the brisk little attorney terminated the conversation in good earnest by stepping from the veranda into Dr. Manning's car, which that scowling practitioner had just halted by the steps. Nor did they waste time in backward handwaving, nor yet consume precious seconds in making themselves comfortable. The car merely rolled down the driveway and swung into the State road, even as Dr. Warner tottered out to the door.

He tottered back directly. Limp, bewildered, he stared at Myra, whose breathing was still quite heavy.

"Why—couldn't you have accepted that?" he asked thinly.

"The money?"

"Yes."

Miss Carson controlled herself with greatest difficulty.

"Shall I tell you," she asked, "exactly what I think of all men?"

"I wish you wouldn't, just now," the scientist said hastily. "I—can guess perfectly, of course."

"And still, being able to guess, you were not man enough to take alone what you had brought on yourself! You must call in your two friends—and they'll tell all their friends and—"

"They'll never do that!" choked the doctor. "This—this was in the nature of a professional confidence."

"I doubt greatly that they regard it as such. And when the scandal does begin, Dr. Warner, if one word—even one—ever is uttered that reflects upon me, I'll make *you* prove the truth of it. You'll learn never again to—"

"That's what I've been trying to say: I

didn't this time. That's what I've been trying to make you believe: I didn't *this* time. Miss Carson, I swear to you by the heaven above us that—"

"Oh, but you've done that repeatedly."

"And I shall keep on doing it until you believe me," Dr. Warner stated hoarsely and held out his hands imploringly. "Miss Carson, won't you—won't you please apply reason to this thing? You're angry. You're quite justified in being angry. But one can't reason properly while angry, I assure you. Try to forget your own side for a moment, if you'll be so good, and look at mine. I—I had a happy home here."

"Why didn't you think of that before you entered the kidnaping business?"

"But I never entered it!" Dr. Warner thundered, and immediately dragged down his voice again. "That— Well, let's try to be reasonable in another way. You're entitled to compensation, Miss Carson."

"Ah?"

"And were it in my power to offer you fifty thousand dollars, it should be offered and paid," the victim pursued very solemnly. "As it is, Stanford guessed the very limit of my cash resources; and if you would do me the great, the—the—the immeasurably great favor of accepting that three thousand dollars— Say, why do you sneer like that?" the doctor gasped, breaking off. "Is there something behind all this that *I* don't suspect?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. All I can tell you is that I'm remaining!"

"But a girl like you—working for a living, I mean to say—surely three thousand dollars—"

"I am remaining!"

"Meaning that no sum of money can buy you off?"

"Meaning just that!"

The doctor passed a thin, artistic hand over his moist brow. His eyes rolled irresponsibly.

"Remaining for—for good?" he asked.

"I think so!"

The doctor's eyes rolled on. They were growing quite alarming now. In fact, if they kept on rolling like that they'd roll straight out of their sockets and—they ceased to roll and moved dazedly toward the open doorway, where stood Mrs. Hodge. The lady wore a plush coat of rare old vintage, a little hat with one white daisy in front. Her left hand clutched a canvas grip, her right an umbrella.

"I'm going now, doctor," she said simply.

"Going where?"

"I'm leaving."

"Oh, but my dear Mrs. Hodge! My dear Mary!" gasped the doctor and started toward her.

"You keep your distance, y' old devil!" snapped the retiring housekeeper rather surprisingly. "I'll have none of your love-making! D'ye hear?"

"I—assure you, I—I hadn't the smallest idea—" Dr. Warner stammered.

"All right. Good-by."

"But you're coming back, of course?"

"*Here?* Hoh!" cried the lady. "Well, I should say not! After the divorce, if Miss Helen's wanting me when she sets up housekeeping—providing she don't go back to her mommer 'n' popper—I'll be there. As for *this* place—hoh!"

She turned away. Dr. Warner mouthed queerly at Myra.

"Can you—can you say anything to keep her here?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not," said Miss Carson.

"You're quite right, deary—*you* can't!" said the lady. "No more can he. I know when to go, at least." And she paused for a last backward thrust, delivered with a very terrible sneer: "Two's company and three's a crowd, eh? Hoh!"

Her heavy step crossed the foyer. The front door of the home opened—and closed again.

And a sudden downpour of ice water would have stimulated Myra's brain precisely as had that slamming of the door. The anger, the red spots on her cheeks, faded out together. Mental activity of the chilliest and most precise description resumed in Myra's brain: even in this bizarre adventure, with the elderly woman on hand the proprieties were fairly satisfied, whereas with the elderly woman removed they were not satisfied at all. What, in Myra's mood of a moment ago, Dr. Warner could not

have accomplished by a solid day of fevered pleading, Mrs. Hodge had contrived all in one small twinkling.

"Gone! Hodge is gone!" Dr. Warner was repeating numbly.

"You're not regretting that?" Myra inquired.

"Good heavens! Aren't *you?*"

"Perhaps I am, but you needn't," the guest said and smiled very faintly. "I think she's saved your life."

"You don't understand, of course. Bad as it may have been—"

"Of course I understand!" Myra said shortly. "That's why I'm going away now."

"You're— What did you say?"

"Well, doctor, I may seem a trifle eccentric at times, but I really do insist on some sort of chaperon."

"You're really going?" Dr. Warner gasped, and a great, glad, incredulous light flamed into his vague eyes. "You're— Would you mind saying that again?"

"You'll grasp it in time," said she and sighed. "How does one get out of your charming little settlement?"

This last minute twenty years had fallen from the doctor. So lately a bowed, almost decrepit figure, he was standing erect now, color flooding back to his face, an unbelieving smile growing with each second. A trifle more provocation and it is possible that the doctor would have broken into a dance, interpreting his joy.

"Well, as to *that,*" he nearly whooped, "I'll attend to that! You'd like me to drive you to the city?"

"I'd as soon take a train down, if the station's near."

"Matter of four miles or more—I can drive it in eight or nine minutes, though. Get you there for the eleven o'clock train—you can go down in sight of Stanford. Stanford couldn't do a thing, could he?" the doctor gibbered gleefully. "Yes, train might be better—would be infinitely better for me, you know, because I have a—a most tremendous day's work ahead of me. Tremendous! Gad, I fancied it 'd never be done, too, and *now*—"

"All right. Get your car," Myra said briefly.

"I'll do that!" cried Dr. Warner, and bounced toward the door—and stopped a minute. "You'll let me say one thing, Miss Carson? I knew—I could have sworn—that you were fundamentally sound as you are! And please don't feel for an instant that I blame you for any little amusement you may have been having here. If I may say so, I think you've been extremely temperate. Most temperate! Another girl might have done almost anything."

"I know! Let's start," said Miss Carson.

"Start! That's the most beautiful word in the whole English language!" the scientist vociferated quite boyishly as he plunged away toward the rear of the house.

At a distance a door slammed. At a greater distance another door creaked, and this presumably was the door of Dr. Warner's garage. Myra, perched on the arm of a chair, smiled pensively and whimsically at the exquisite rug beneath her feet.

Well—the ridiculous little drama had reached a sudden curtain, had it not? A moment before she was not entirely sure whether she was glad or sorry. Warner had not been punished enough, and—oh, but she *was* glad! So glad, indeed, was Myra that her throat tightened and tears welled to her lovely eyes; because now she was going away—and going home.

Surrender or no surrender, unless train schedules had been changed, she would go to bed late this night in the little old home town; and her mother, as she knew quite well, would come and tuck her in, and her beloved father would come in for a good-night kiss and sit on the edge of the bed a while and chat—and the kids would be duly disappointed at the absence of many presents.

All of which may have been very weak and very childish, but—oh, it was a glorious prospect to contemplate, this one of—home!

Myra dabbed at her eyes and recovered her poise. Some of us are born to go to great cities and reduce them to subjection; others of us are foreordained to tend old-fashioned gardens and plan church socials and participate with larklike happiness in amateur theatricals of the most harrowing badness. And Myra Carson was one of

these latter; she knew it now, and she would never wander again. She had craved much noise and many thrills; the noise had been vouchsafed her in plenty, and the thrills, somewhat delayed, had arrived unpleasantly and in too great quantity.

And now she was through with it all and going back; and perhaps she would tell dad all about the one wild night, and dad would go quite wild himself and come down here and attend to them in his own fashion. And perhaps she would not say a word about it, unless Arthur Bond's ravings made explanation necessary. In fact, if the thing were possible, Miss Carson fancied that she would just admit failure and slip back into the happy old rut; for if there was one thing for which every atom of her shrieked just now it was peace, utter peace.

There would be difficulties, of course, the main one being that accursed fur cloak. She could not well appear in the home town with that hairy fortune. But she could stop in the city and—yes, pawn it, of course—and buy herself another and more fitting garment and— Ah, there came the doctor.

He was swirling around the corner of the house now with a care-free effect that suggested a racing driver in search of extinction; and now brakes screamed and tires scraped, and there was a burst of song from without.

The doctor's key rattled cheerily in the front door and he was before her.

"I'll go and change to my own dress," Myra murmured, rising.

"What? Oh, no, you won't!" laughed the gay doctor. "I know how long it takes a woman to get from one dress into another. Just take that one of yours along—I'll lend you a hand bag, of course—and wrap that cloak around you, and mail back that thing later, my child. Any time within the week, that is—but be sure it *is* within the week, please. Oh, no! I want to get you to that train, Miss Carson."

"Well—there's another thing."

"Anything on earth, within my power," the scientist said quite grandly.

"Thanks. I'll have to borrow ten or fifteen dollars from you."

"What?" cried the doctor. "Ten or fifteen! Nonsense! Rank nonsense! Why, you must take a hundred or a hundred and fifty, at the very least. Why, my dear girl, ten or fifteen—" He burst into wild laughter at the absurdity. He prodded about in his pocket and produced a very plump billfold. "Fortunate—distinctly fortunate!" he carolled. "It just happens that my—that I have a little extra cash in the house. Rather lucky, eh? Here! Let's see how much there is of it! You'll have to borrow most of it—forever! Oh, yes, I insist on that!"

A man fully restored to life and all its joys, he glided to the big flat-top desk and opened his wallet. In point of volume, much money was there—much new money, crisp fives and tens. The doctor shuffled them over rapidly.

"There's one hundred and fifty dollars!" he cried. "And—oh, now, see here, Miss Carson—you mustn't push it away like that. That one hundred and fifty is the absolute minimum. I insist—"

He did not finish the sentence. Outside, there had been a noisy metallic rattle; now somebody stepped, again and again, upon the accelerator of a decrepit automobile engine, filling difficult cylinders with gas against the next start.

"Did you—did you think you heard the front door open just then and somebody on the stairs, Miss Carson?" the doctor asked softly.

"Yes, some one moving very quietly," said Myra, and her eyes widened. "Mrs. Hodge may have come back for something?"

"Impossible, that. Hodge cannot move quietly," the doctor murmured, and thrust the crisp new bills into her hand. "Here! Take this money, and I'll investigate."

The flattened wallet was stuffed back into his hip pocket; he opened the door widely and listened.

"Upon my soul!" breathed he. "I believe somebody's walking around up there, Miss Carson. I—by Jove! They're coming down now."

And he disappeared, stepping into the lower hall; and for no earthly reason, since it was broad daylight and she had never

feared housebreakers at any hour, a very cold chill ran through Myra. Ghastly premonition reached out and gripped at her heart; she listened most intently as the doctor's step went on toward the stairs.

Then—and it went through Myra's being like a two-edged sword—a sweet, high-keyed woman's voice said:

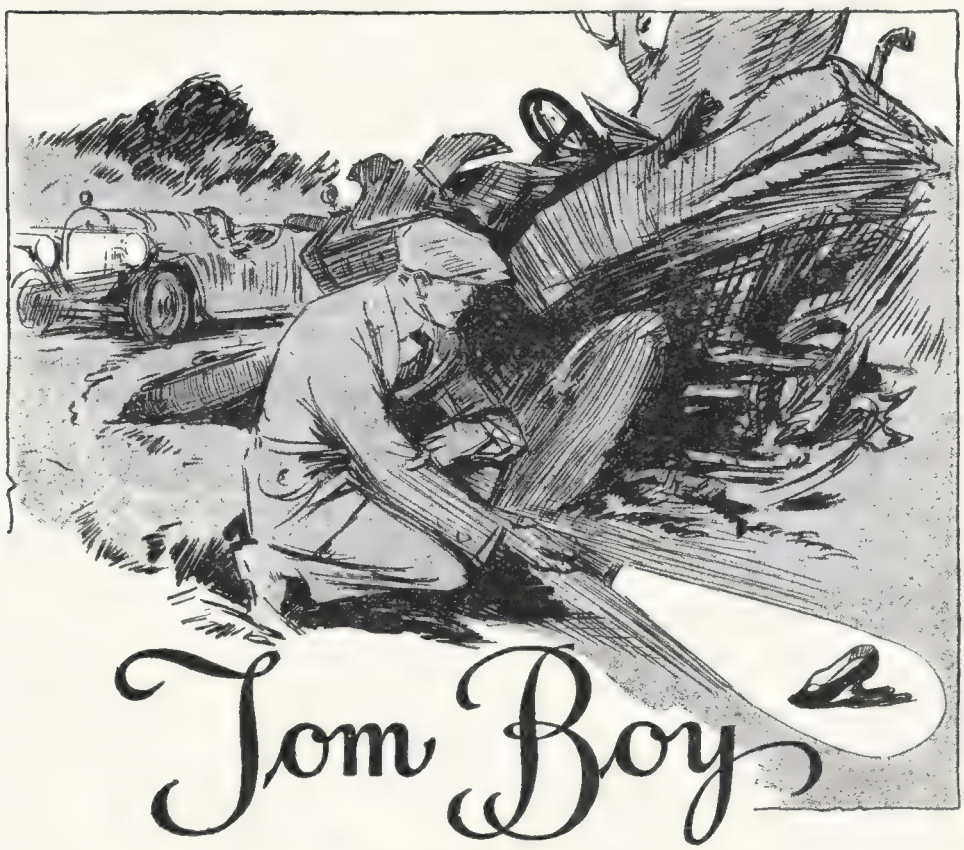
"Henry Warner!"

"My—darling!" the doctor faltered.

It had happened. Something in her very bones, these last fifteen seconds, had informed her that it was about to happen. Myra looked around frantically. There was one door to this room and one window, the first leading to the hall, the latter in fullest view of the hall. And the window was locked, too, and to open it one would have had to drag over a chair and stand on that. Furthermore, the designer of this particular room had provided for thousands of books and had absolutely neglected the matter of convenient hiding places. There was no handy little closet into which one might step; there was not even a low screen behind which one might crouch.

So Miss Carson, gripping her nice new bills, stood perfectly still.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



Tom Boy

By PAUL F. WHELTON

ROARING along after midnight on the black highway that led to the town of Wellesley and home, the low-slung roadster threw its streaming lights on another and motionless machine, wrecked and slewed into a position that crowded the thoroughfare dangerously.

Clark gave vent to a startled exclamation, stepped hard on his foot brake and climbed out to investigate. He quickly cir-

cled the car, fearing to find some one pinned in the wreckage, and was relieved when his fears proved groundless. Then he discovered that the twisted machine had been stripped of its number plates.

He went back to his roadster and dug out a flash light from beneath the seat. The beam from the light he threw into the interior of the wreck, but there was nothing in either front or rear compartment to indicate the identity of the late occupants.

"Joy riders out of luck," he decided. "At least they might have had a light put on this thing."

Turning from the car toward his own machine, he kicked a light object lying on the ground, hidden in a black shadow cast by a staggered front wheel and a torn and dangling mudguard. He groped in the dust for the object, brought it up and pressed the button of the flash light.

It was a woman's slipper, a tiny thing of black satin with a French heel. Twice he turned it over in his hand, inspecting it, before a tiny, gold-stamped monogram on the back of the heel caught his eye. He started in dismay.

"Hell!" he ejaculated.

For a moment he stood statuelike, sharply outlined against the glare of his headlights. Then, suddenly, he thrust the slipper into his pocket, jumped back to the roadster, climbed in behind the wheel and shot away.

At home he put the car up and hastened to the house where he picked up the telephone and called a Boston hotel.

"Is Miss Paurell in her room?" he asked when he had been given his connection.

"Just a minute; I'll see," the hotel operator answered. And then, after a moment, "She hasn't come in yet; is there any message?"

"No, thank you." Clark hung up. He was a much worried young man.

II.

On May fifteen, Clark, for the initial time in his life, attended the first night of a musical comedy. The musical comedy was "Tom Boy." Perhaps some mischievious imp of fate had a hand in guiding the footsteps of Clark this night, for the type of entertainment represented by "Tom Boy" was a type he detested. Yet he went. He could not have explained why himself. He just went.

Be it chronicled, however, that he was in the audience again on the second night and on the third night and on the fourth—which illustrates the depth of the impression left on him by "Tom Boy"—and Jackie Paurell.

In short, when Clark took his seat at the start of the fourth night's performance, he did so as a lover—at a distance measured by an orchestra pit and eight orchestra rows. Had such an interpretation been given him of his sudden interest in musical comedy he would have experienced a feeling of horror at the very thought. On the other hand it could not be proved by Jackie Paurell, because Miss Paurell, seated in her dressing room marked with a star, never even had heard the name Benjamin Franklin Clark.

But the fact remained that Clark was a lover, and that he loved Miss Jackie Paurell. It was equally a fact that it was the first occasion on which his heart had ever responded to anything feminine, notwithstanding that his daily life was filled with womankind.

Benjamin Franklin Clark was to be distinguished from the other Boston Clarks by reason of his being of the shoe Clarks. The shoe Clarks were Clark and his father, Carroll Sawyer Clark, proprietors of a fashionable if not exclusive women's footwear shop in Tremont Street, overlooking Boston Common.

Very little, if any indeed, did Clark run with the herd. His life was one of long active days spent chiefly in fussing with the complaints of imaginative older ladies and the exactions of imperious younger ones. He had slight time for the things called frailties that tend to block from success the young man in business. But, beginning with the night of May fifteenth, he had given himself over heartily for four evenings to the business of worshiping a diminutive titian-haired idol from afar. For three of these nights, too, he had sat in a certain hotel café after the theater—be-

cause he had discovered Jackie went there. And while she chatted and nibbled and danced, Clark, with his food scarcely touched before him, drank in longingly every note of the music that was her laughter, every flash of the light that was her smile, and every glint of the red gold that was her hair. Thus did she appear to Clark.

Jackie was equally entrancing outside the theater or on the stage, he decided. He knew at just what point in the garish piece she made her entrance, a breezy entrance albeit breeziness was rendered somewhat difficult by the necessity for her emerging on one hand and two knees from a dog house. Jackie, you see, was the tomboy of "Tom Boy."

Clark knew her cue, knew that a shrill voice calling from within the house of the set, denoted her appearance. At this call the tousled head appeared, snapping eyes peering wide in surprise at the two characters occupying the stage. Then, while laughter swept the theater, she struggled out through the narrow aperture with a blinking puppy clutched firmly under one arm. A few seconds later she launched into the song hit of the show, "They Call Her Tom Boy."

She wore no hat. Her bobbed, gold-red locks were a masterpiece of pretty disarrangement, errant wisps flicking long lashes of eyes that were blue and dancing. Her nose was a tiny stubby thing that one sensed, under the paint and powder, was freckled. Her mouth was a small red bow, laughing at the corners and carmined not for shape but for relief. She wore a boy's shirt of some drab stuff, opened at the neck, revealing an expanse of milky whiteness. Breeches, ragged and torn, were below, and high-laced, kicked-out boots of a smallness in the foot that was startling.

This was Jackie who, innocently enough, had sounded a new and strange note in Clark's heart. And he had no hope of ever meeting her. Certainly such a hope was far out of mind when, on his fourth successive night at the show, in the smoking room, he came upon the one man of his college acquaintances that he wished least to meet. But apparently this last man harbored no such thought with relation to Clark. He greeted the latter cordially and shook his reluctant hand in a hearty grasp.

"You remember me surely, don't you—Hardiman, class of '14?"

"I remember you, yes."

"Thought you would. Still, I don't suppose you could forget it. It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

Clark was silent.

"Playing any football now?" Hardiman asked unabashed.

"No, haven't played since college."

"Living in Boston?"

"Wellesley; in business here."

"Like the show?" Hardiman asked.

"It's a peach," Clark responded with more enthusiasm. "That Paurell girl is a wonder; best I've ever seen. You like it?"

"Sure! I'm the advance man. That Paurell baby is good; great kid, too."

Clark started. "Do you know her?" he asked quickly.

"Sure I know her. I said I was the advance man, the press agent. Like to meet her?"

"I'd be delighted. But I wouldn't know how to act."

"Act natural."

It seemed all so easy. Clark was introduced to Jackie in the hotel café he had haunted for three nights, longing to know her and alternately hating and envying the males who sat with her. He shook her hand, a tiny hand, and was invited to remain at her table.

There opened for him a new life. Strange expressions poured into his eager ears; the jargon of theater shop talk. But his rôle was a silent one until Jackie from across the table asked him if he liked the show. After a time he realized that he had been talking animatedly with her for minutes, and that Hardiman was glaring in his direction with a look of displeasure that was unmistakable. Then Hardiman asked Jackie to dance.

"I cannot—to-night," she replied.

Hardiman colored and retorted, "It's rather sudden, isn't it?"

"Don't be silly. I can't dance, because I snapped a heel off my shoe when I got out of the taxi. Didn't I, Jocko?"

The man called Jocko assented.

"See," she exclaimed, drawing her foot back from beneath the table and displaying the cracked heel of a tiny slipper. "I'll turn my ankle probably before I get back to the hotel."

"I can fix that in half an hour." The words had passed Clark's lips before he had opportunity to be abashed at his audacity. Then came a rush of exultation. Here was a chance to serve this girl.

But she would have none of it. "No," she exclaimed, "I was joking; I'll get home by taxi, the same way I came."

"But I insist. I can do it if you will wait here." Clark was all eagerness.

"My, you're a determined fellow. Of course I'll wait if you are bent on putting yourself to trouble. But it really isn't necessary."

"If you'll give me the slipper—"

She dimpled and laughed, then drew the shoe off.

"I'll be back in half an hour," Clark said briskly.

He secured his coat, called a taxi and was whirled east up Boylston Street into Tremont. From here he walked down Avery Street, turning into Mason and letting himself into the shop through the rear door. He groped his way to the repair room, switched on a single light, and set to work replacing the damaged heel. Now he saw what he had not noticed before, a tiny gold monogram stamped into the satin of the heel. It held his eye in approval. He traced out the letters "J. L. P."

"Pretty darn good," he commented, removing the satin from the cracked heel. Then steadily for ten minutes he concentrated on his task of repairing the slipper.

III.

"DON'T move—you! We've got guns on you."

Clark's pulse skipped. The sudden staccato bark of a man's voice somewhere in the darkness shocked him into momentary numbness. The slipper rattled to the floor.

"Stick up your paws; don't try any funny stuff," the voice commanded in harsh warning. "Come on, move!"

Clark obeyed as his eye caught a glint as of light on metal. The owner of the voice stepped into the radiance cast by the single bulb and Clark saw the blue of a uniform. The man was a police sergeant. Clark laughed in relief and his hands dropped.

"Put 'em up!" The pistol was thrust toward him in emphasis and two other figures behind the first moved quickly. Suddenly it flashed over him that he had forgotten to release the alarm device as he entered.

"The joke is on you, gentlemen," he said. "I'm the—"

"Keep 'em up," the sergeant barked. "Daley, see what he's got on him; and stick the bracelets on." The policeman Daley stepped briskly forward, seized Clark's arms and quickly snapped on the handcuffs, then patted his pockets.

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Clark, "you've got me wrong, sergeant! Who owns this shop?"

"What are you trying to pull now?" the officer demanded suspiciously.

"Look in the desk." Clark waved his manacled hands toward the roll top in the office adjoining. "The upper drawer; no, at the left—that's it. See those letterheads? I'm the Benjamin Franklin Clark whose name is on that head. Not convinced yet? See that pile of junk on top. Go through that and pull out a thin magazine with a green cover."

He turned for a second and winked at the other two policemen. Their response was a frown. The sergeant pulled out the trade magazine indicated.

"Page six," directed Clark. "There's a picture there somewhere with Benjamin Franklin Clark under it. It doesn't exactly flatter me, but it's fair."

The sergeant glanced up from the page and from under bushy eyebrows swept Clark's face with a keen glance. "Looks like you O. K., and I guess it's all right. But what are you doing in here at this time of night, mister, coming in the back way and leaving the automatic on?"

"Take these off first, won't you." Clark lifted his manacled wrists.

"I'm helping a lady in distress," he ex-

plained when he had been released. He picked up the slipper from the floor. "She broke off her heel—here." He pointed to the monogrammed piece of satin that had covered it. "I left her in a restaurant while I came down to fix it."

After they had gone he went to work furiously, mindful of the precious time he had lost. In short order, with the heel replaced, he raced back to the hotel where Jackie sat, wearing one slipper and minus the other.

She bubbled with delight. Then Clark, in apology for having been gone over his set time, detailed his brief period of captivity as a burglar. To his surprise she did not join in the general laughter.

"How terrible!" she exclaimed with wide eyes. "Weren't you frightened horribly? I know I would be." He thrilled at her quick solicitude.

Clark did not know how, nor did he dare to ask to dance with this dainty creature. But she settled this for him, and shortly he found himself dancing with her, a dance of intoxication, while every fiber in him tingled and he longed to crush her closer and press kiss after kiss on the mouth that smiled up at him. The plaintive music stopped. For an instant he thought she pressed his hand; then they were threading their way back through the maze of tables.

Hardiman, fumbling a water glass, glanced sharply at Clark's flushed face. Other parties were leaving the Egyptian Room; the orchestra men were putting away their instruments.

"Mr. Clark is going to take me back," Jackie announced. "Aren't you, Mr. Clark?"

They were outside in the hotel lobby. "If you care to take a ride first, I have a machine handy," he suggested. "The garage will run it over for me."

They swept in the low car out through the Fens into Commonwealth Avenue, roared up the long slope at Boston College and then slipped silently down across the Charles River to the open country beyond. The cool night air, damp in the hollows, heavy on the hills, was like old wine. For miles neither spoke. But Clark was ever sensible of the girl reclining back beside him, her shoulder brushing his, her feet with tiny slippers crossed, hands folded in her lap. At intervals a hint of an exotic perfume was wafted into his eager nostrils, and again a wisp of golden hair whipped back to fleck his cheek.

They stopped at last to turn back. Off somewhere in the distance a church bell struck two. Jackie sighed.

"It's wonderful—at night," she breathed. She glanced sidewise at him. Slowly he leaned and kissed her soft lips. His cheeks were flaming; her eyes were closed.

IV.

THESE were full days for Clark — and full nights. Regularly after each performance he met her, and, to the open discomfiture of Hardiman, stole her away to himself to dance or to talk or to take long rides. Thrice when her maid, Marie, was present, he was even permitted the privilege of entering Jackie's dressing room at the theater.

But this night, when Clark, dumfounded, sat in the library at his home, absently fingering a woman's shoe, he had been unable to meet her. A business dinner, at which attendance was imperative, held him until nearly midnight. She had said she would go direct to her hotel. But here was a monogrammed slipper, such as he had repaired for her, lying beside a wrecked automobile far out of town. And she was not at the hotel.

He regarded the slipper in his hand questioningly, torn between fear that she had been injured and speculation as to with whom she had been riding. Once more he called the hotel; the call was fruitless. He replaced the slipper in the pocket of his topcoat and went to bed.

Stopping only for a swallow of coffee in lieu of breakfast, Clark legged it for his Boston train in the morning with but seconds to spare in which to buy a newspaper and climb aboard. He wondered again as he settled back in his seat if Jackie had been injured in the crash of the car. Then he opened his paper—and suddenly sat upright, staring hard at the printed sheet. A story on the first page was headed in two columns:

"Find Mystery Car Wrecked In Road;

Bloodstains In Auto—License Plates Missing—Believe Machine Stolen."

Followed a brief tale of the finding of the car into which Clark had nearly crashed less than a dozen hours before. The machine was believed to have struck a tree, the article stated. The absence of license plates lent suspicion that it had been stolen. There was another paragraph — and here Clark drew in his breath swiftly with a sucking sound. The heel of a woman's shoe, torn from the shoe itself, had been found near the machine.

His hasty perusal of the story left him aghast. Again and again he read the article, groping for an answer to the dark question it raised in his mind, but finding none.

At the South Station he went direct to a telephone and called the hotel. Jackie was not in her room. Then he raced up to the shop, but despite the chatter and babble attendant on the rush of business he was unable to detach his thoughts from the hapless auto and the mystery of Jackie's presence in the car. If only he could reach her and obtain her explanation.

At noon he slipped out and bought an early edition of an evening paper, hoping to find a more detailed account of the finding of the car. He did find it; rather he had no chance to hunt for it. Instead it flashed up blackly under his gaze. Spread across the eight columns of the front page was the headline: "Burglars Slay Discoverer!" Then came: "West Newton Man, Dying, Calls Police; Slayers Abandon Stolen Auto After Wrecking It In Flight."

With set face, and with every nerve of him tense, he ran rapidly through the graphic narrative. The victim, alone in his home, had surprised two masked men rifling a downstairs room. Both fired at him, then fled. With the last vestige of his strength, he reached the telephone and gasped out to the operator what had happened. He was dead when the police found him. An auto answering the description of the machine found wrecked had been seen to whirl furiously out of the street where the house of the murder was located, and go west. The police identified the supposed murder car as one stolen the night before.

The writer had not neglected the woman angle. He played heavily on the finding of the slipper heel, and it was set forth that the police were hunting the woman.

Clark went back to the shop in a daze. He could not call Jackie now, he knew. The first word regarding events of the past night must come from her.

Two men were waiting in the office of the shop when he returned. They wore square-toed, thick-soled shoes. But he noted this not at all, even when one of the visitors, with face unsmiling, requested that he close the door. He did so.

"You Mr. Clark?" asked one.

"I am," Clark agreed.

"I want you to answer some questions. You are not compelled to answer them now; you may be later."

Clark drew his brows together in a frown. A dread premonition settled over him. He noted now the serious mien of his two visitors. But he said merely, "Certainly. Won't you sit down?"

"Will you tell us, please, where you were last night, say from eight o'clock until one this morning?"

Clark gestured with his hand. "Wait just a moment!" he exclaimed. "I'd like first to know for whom I am answering these questions."

"My name is Raftery," said the inquisitor; "this is Mr. Flynn. We are inspectors from police headquarters."

"I'll answer them," returned Clark. "I was at a banquet at the Quincy House up to nearly midnight. I walked from there to Park Square, got my machine, and drove home to Wellesley." He traced the route he took, but volunteered no word of his coming upon the wrecked automobile.

"What kind of a car did you drive?"

"A Starmer roadster—1921."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

The inspector thrust out one hand toward Clark. "Did you ever see a shoe with a heel like this?" he asked.

Clark glanced into the outstretched hand. He hesitated. Then, "Yes," he answered slowly.

"Whose was it?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that."

" You may have to later."

" Perhaps, but I can't tell you now."

" Didn't you have such a slipper in this place one night three weeks ago?"

" I did."

" Where did you get it?"

" I can't tell you that, either."

" Have you the slipper now?"

Clark hesitated again, then answered, " No."

The inspector frowned. " Don't you know for sure?"

" Yes."

The other inspector broke in. " Have you any slipper resembling this; with such a decoration on it?" He pointed to the monogram. It was a chance shot.

" Yes," answered Clark reluctantly.

" Where is it?"

Clark produced the slipper he had found. The first inspector looked it over carefully. Then he rose.

" I'll have to ask you to come up to headquarters with us," he said.

An hour later Clark understood that he was detained. But he refused steadfastly to disclose from what source he had obtained either slipper. As he sat in the detention room under guard, he brooded gloomily over the fickleness of a fate that had brought him, first into friendship, then into love with Jackie, and now had landed him in the hands of the police.

The question of Jackie's whereabouts worried him vastly. His very inability to communicate with her increased his anxiety a hundred fold. He speculated whether he was acting wisely in protecting her. This led him into a deeper channel; why should he have such a sublime faith in a girl he had known for only three weeks? What did he really know about girls? Was it not possible that she had been playing with him; that she was bad at the core; that she was a girl of easy conscience, in close association with desperate men? He thrust the ugly thought aside as the memory of the one time they had kissed recurred to him. He found himself pacing the floor.

" She can't be bad," he muttered fiercely, and the nails of his clenched hands bit into the flesh. " She just met them casually; she couldn't have known their business."

Suddenly he wheeled and talked with the guard. The guard conferred with the lieutenant, after which Clark was permitted to summon Hardiman from his hotel.

The press agent came to headquarters, and Clark told him the story. At its conclusion Clark thought he detected a sneer on Hardiman's face, but it was gone in a moment. When he left, it was with a promise to tell Jackie that Clark was detained unavoidably and would communicate with her as soon as possible.

He spent a wretched night, but in the morning he was allowed the newspapers. No mention of Jackie or himself. His spirits rose. But they sank again when he realized that he was no nearer freedom than before. Once more, during the morning, he was questioned regarding the slippers, but still he refused firmly to reveal their ownership.

" Don't be a damn fool, boy," growled one of his questioners not unkindly. " You say you're O. K. in this thing, so you must be covering up some one. It don't pay, I'm telling you. Take care of yourself first."

" God knows I hate to think she had any part in this," cried the almost distracted prisoner. " Damn it, I don't know what to think."

The grilling ended finally with Clark promising that if nothing further had developed by night he would communicate with the owner of the slippers.

He paced the morning away, his thoughts of the blackest. He could not betray Jackie, he told himself again and again; as the girl he loved he must shield her until she came forward herself with her story. He wondered, too, about Hardiman. He did not trust Hardiman; never had trusted him. After Hardiman, a thief, was dropped first from the football squad and then from college, Clark had forgotten him until the meeting in the theater.

The lieutenant entered the room hurriedly, interrupting Clark's troubled reverie.

" Do you know a Jacqueline Paurell?" the lieutenant demanded.

Clark started, aghast. The blood drained from his face. They had traced Jackie.

" Yes," he answered slowly.

" Come out here."

Laggingly, he followed the officer through a corridor to a room at the end.

" Know these birds, too?" questioned his guide, stepping into the room.

Clark looked in.

" Hardiman!" he cried. The advance man was seated beside and handcuffed to Inspector Raftery. Then Clark glimpsed a girl at the far end of the bench and his heart seemed to stop beating. In front of her stood Inspector Flynn. He moved. The girl was Jackie's maid, Marie.

Clark was weak. " Why—ah—what is it, Hardiman; what does it mean?" he cried.

The press agent leered with distorted face. " Aw—go to hell," he returned.

" It means we got 'em," said the lieutenant to Clark. " Come on with me and you can check out." He crossed the corridor and pushed into another room. Clark trailed after. A pair of arms were flung round his neck, his head was pulled down, and soft lips were pressed to his.

" You poor, poor boy," a tearful voice said—and he was gazing into the eyes of Jackie. " You foolish, foolish boy, why didn't you tell me?"

The lieutenant coughed discreetly and suddenly turned from gazing out of the window. " That's a mighty clever girl," he barked. " She's a whole police force."

" Now if you'll tell me what this is all about," Clark suggested, dividing a puzzled smile between Jackie and the officer.

" Why, Marie has owned up to everything," Jackie began. " I'm the stupid one. Don't you understand? I've been missing things from my dressing room for more than two weeks. Remember the first night you were in there? After you had gone I missed a diamond ring that was on the table. Another night I lost a diamond barpin. Then my wrist watch disappeared. It looked awfully funny. Every time you were in the room I lost something. Then my satin slippers — the ones you fixed—vanished three or four night ago—and you had not been in.

" Yesterday," she rushed on, " Fred Hardiman came over and told me you had been arrested for killing a man. I almost fainted, but I couldn't believe it. I asked a boy I know on one of the newspapers to find out for me. To-day he told me they were trying to learn from you where you got a shoe with a heel on it like one they found near the automobile. I knew, when I heard of the monogram, that the shoe was mine.

" I saw Marie getting into an automobile the night before last, and as soon as I knew of the slipper to-day something seemed to tell me I ought to question her. I went up to her suddenly and asked, ' Where are my slippers that you stole?' She turned white and gave herself dead away. I made her stay in the room then while I phoned for a policeman.

" She cried and told the whole story. Her husband is Denver Joe Allen, she said. He was in prison down South, but before he went he asked Hardiman, an old pal of his, to get Marie a job. Hardiman asked me to take her on when my maid was married three weeks ago.

" Denver Joe broke jail," Jackie continued, " and came to Boston, where he stole an automobile. He called up Hardiman and then met Marie and him after the show night before last. Marie said they drove a long distance and then left her in the car. Pretty soon they came running back, and Hardiman, when he jumped into the machine, cried, ' We've got to get to hell out of here; we croaked a guy.' Marie said they went at a terrible rate of speed, but out in the country they hit something in the road and the steering gear went wrong and they bumped a tree. When she came to they had her in a field. Her leg was bleeding and she had on only one slipper and the heel was gone from that. They were my slippers. She owned up that she took them because they were going to jump the town. They finally got her back to Boston.

" Marie confessed that she took my ring and pin and watch. She said Hardiman told her to take things only when you had been in. He wanted me to think you a thief so I would break with you. Her husband lit out the morning after the murder —yesterday morning. Hardiman thought he and Marie were safe. And did you think

I had a part in an affair like that?" she demanded in breathless conclusion.

"I didn't know what to think, Jackie," replied Clark soberly. "I knew that if you had been there it couldn't have been with your eyes open. And I called and called the hotel—and you were not there."

"No! I went to Pauline Knight's hotel with her and she asked me to stay. I never thought anything like this would happen."

"But, honestly, didn't you think that—ah—possibly I might have stolen your things?" asked Clark with a grin.

"I guess I didn't know what to think. But I was glad that something disappeared when you had not been there."

The lieutenant offered to call a taxi for Jackie and Clark. When they started away she was deep in thought. Then suddenly she said:

"Wouldn't it have been awful if we couldn't have proved we were not in on that? I'm almost afraid to think of it. What do you suppose they will get?"

"Either first degree or second degree murder," Clark answered. "They probably will be lenient to Marie, under the circumstances. Hardiman and Denver Joe—if they get him—may be allowed to plead guilty to second degree, but I doubt it. They were committing a felony when they killed the man."

"Is second degree better than first?"

"Second degree is life imprisonment; first degree is death."

Jackie shuddered. "Goodness," she cried, "life imprisonment is almost as bad as death."

"Oh, I don't know. I'd like to draw life sentence with a boy I know."

"A boy? Whatever in the world are you talking about?"

"Yes—a boy!" said Clark. "They call her Tom Boy!"

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RECOVERY

PAIN and I have come to know
Each other very well.
These throbbing months of anguish, long
And irrepressible.

Stark nights of suffering were mine
And sombre days no less;
Had it not been for pain, I should
Have died of loneliness.

But while pain's grasp encircled me
And held me straitly in,
I had no time to ponder on
How lonely I have been.

It's strange, it's very strange, somehow,
That I have no more pain.
I ask, will I be lonely now
That I am well again?

Garnett Laidlaw Eskew.

The Ju-Ju Man

By THOMAS H. GRIFFITHS and ARMSTRONG LIVINGSTON

Authors of " The Soul of the Lamp," " The Diamond Theft," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

"A KNIFE AT HER THROAT."

THE pair of villains stood in silence before the entrance to the cave, awed by their proximity to the loot for which they had toiled with an energy that otherwise directed might have secured them a small but honest competence. No pangs of conscience troubled them, however; neither spared a thought for Kaven, torn to fragments by savage crocodiles, nor to the Bololo boy, cruelly slain as his hungry eyes rested on the home of his people, and their meditations were unclouded by any sorrow for the warriors whose bodies still lay near the ruins of Holden's factory.

Lombo and Anoka came softly up.

"Him gold lib for here?"

Burk regarded the headman speculatively, wondering what thoughts were passing behind that round, black, expressionless face. He directed an inquiring look at his more sapient partner, who promptly answered the unspoken question.

"May as well wise 'em up. Later on, if necessary—well, you know the sort of men who tell no tales."

"The practical application of that proverb," agreed the Irishman pleasantly, "has saved us a lot of trouble in the past." He turned to Lombo indulgently. "Him gold most assuredly lib for here!"

The Boer paused for no more futile conversation. He strode to the entrance and disappeared into the black depths of the

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cave. Presently his voice came to the ears of his burly companion, who had remained without to keep a sharp eye on the two natives.

"Matches, Dan? I've used all mine."

Burk felt in his pockets. "Too few to waste," he replied.

Smale reappeared in the entrance, blinking at the sudden change from dark to day. "It's too big a place to search without a decent light. Skip back to the camp, Dan, and rustle out a lantern."

"Huh! While two able-bodied savages sit in the shade and watch me?" The Irishman was filled with righteous indignation. "What price the prestige of the race, Piet?"

He turned sharply to the fetish man. "Now, then, Anoka! You lib for camp quick-quick. Get um lantern. Savvy?"

It was plain that Anoka savvied beautifully. His eyes flashed as he drew himself erect, and his fierce brows met in an ominous frown. Instead of answering Burk, he swung upon Lombo and shot out a few guttural sentences that obviously made the chief very uncomfortable. His fat body, shaking like a jelly, seemed to shrink upon itself with a suggestion of cringing humility. He said nothing, but with a submissive nod to Anoka he set himself into motion and waddled rapidly away toward the camp.

Burk gazed after him curiously.

"Will you look at that?" he exclaimed. "Our toy magician here has the old man eating right out of his hand."

Smale was glum.

"I wish you hadn't done that," he commented soberly. "You'll get us in bad with this chap if you try to make him run errands like a messenger boy. You're a tactless animal, Dan!"

Burk sneered in disgust, though at the bottom of his heart he admitted the justice of his friend's strictures. Reckless though he was, he had no desire at this stage of the game to make fresh enemies. Even his combative nature was satisfied with the prospect of future trouble, and he began to share the Boer's eagerness to see the coast of Africa sinking below the horizon astern.

They waited patiently for Lombo, who presently returned with a battered tin lantern. Burk trimmed the wick, cursing the native negligence that caused the delay, and lit it.

He stepped into the cave, the others close at his heels, and held the lantern as high as he could reach. The light was strong enough to show that the place where they stood was about thirty feet square—and absolutely empty.

Burk was only temporarily dismayed. After all, no one leaves a treasure of raw gold in plain sight!

"We'll have to do a bit of hunting. What's your idea, Piet? Do you s'pose it could be buried in this floor?"

Smale toed the hard earthen surface thoughtfully, glancing keenly about him the while.

"There's more rock than dirt, and there's no sign of its having been disturbed recently. Still, if we look around—hello! What's that?"

Burk hurriedly brought the light to bear upon the spot that had caught the Boer's attention. It proved to be a hole in the rear wall, level with the surface, and about three feet square. Their hearts bounded to a sudden hope. The Irishman knelt down, holding the lantern slightly behind him, and peered into the orifice.

"By Jove!" he cried. "I'm blessed if it isn't a passage to another cave!"

"See anything?"

"No. Shall I crawl in and investigate?"

"Sure," grunted Smale. "Keep your gun handy. I'll stay here and see that nobody sends a spear after you."

Burk needed no second bidding. With his revolver in one hand and the lantern in the other, he commenced a slow and painful pilgrimage on his knees, cursing irritably as he bumped his head from time to time against the low roof of the passage. In a minute his muffled voice was heard. "I'm through!"

"What do you see?" shouted the Boer.

"Not a damn thing. This cave is a little smaller than the one you're in—and it's just as bare."

The suspense was too much for Lombo. He dropped on all fours and followed where Burk had led.

Alone in the dark with Anoka, whom he was far from trusting, the cautious Smale put his back to the rocky wall and silently drew his knife from its sheath. His sharp ears listened attentively for any movement of the witch doctor.

He was immensely relieved when the mouth of the tunnel began to grow luminous, signifying the return of Burk and his lantern. The Irishman struggled to his feet, breathing heavily and wiping streams of perspiration from his face.

"Nothing in sight, Piet," he said in a low voice that was almost hoarse with disappointment. "Four blank walls and one blank floor! It's a divining rod we should have brought for this business."

Lombo, wheezing painfully, emerged from the passage and straightened himself beside Burk. In the light of the lantern his eyes had an ugly glint.

"No see um gold!" he grumbled.

"Patience, sweet chuck!" snarled Burk. He pulled the map from one of his pockets and spread it upon the floor beside the lantern. With one accord the four men forgot all suspicion and distrust as they knelt down and touched their heads together over the scrap of paper.

"Rock shaped like a pyramid," growled Burk. "Cross the river—two hundred yards west. What's the catch, Piet?"

The Boer mumbled something unintelligible, continuing to gaze at the map with fierce concentration.

"Of course we didn't inch the distance with a tape measure," added the Irishman, "but we must have counted within a few feet of two hundred yards, and I'll swear this is the most likely spot in all the desolate region."

"I'm darn sure this is the right place," said Smale positively, "but we're not lookin' for the stuff in the right way. We must get a gang of these blacks, a few more lanterns, and rip the whole cave wide open." He rose to his feet. "No use staring at this map; let's get busy."

Lombo had listened with eager attention to the Boer, and his knowledge of English was sufficient to enable him to catch the gist of Smale's last speech. The headman muttered a few words in an undertone to Anoka and then turned to the white men. "Me go for boys," he volunteered. "Find gold quick-quick!"

He hurried from the cave and once more disappeared in the direction of the camp. He returned in a remarkably short time with a score of enthusiastic fortune hunters and three more lanterns whose combined light provided ample illumination for the pursuit of more extensive operations. Lombo, his eyes glistening with greed, spoke a few words of command to his men. They split into small groups, each of which took one section of the outer cave for its own.

They worked with a will, using rough picks, mattocks, and even the heads of their spears, and in less than an hour they had churned up the earth and gravel to a depth sufficient to assure the most optimistic of them that there was nothing buried beneath the floor.

Smale and the Irishman, watching the digging and occasionally directing them, took the disappointment philosophically, for they were still convinced that the gold was somewhere about, and that it would certainly be found. While the blacks stopped for breath, the Boer and his companion made a circuit of the cave, tapping every inch of the walls with the butts of their revolvers. Their efforts were vain. The stony surfaces gave back the same dull answer at every point; there was no hollow echo to indicate a hidden recess.

Smale stood still, as they finished, and wiped his streaming brow. The heat was insufferable, and the stench of sweltering black bodies was well-nigh unendurable.

"Phew!" he cried. "Gimme air!"

He made for the entrance, followed by Burk, and they stumbled out into the clean, fresh air and sunlight. They stayed there some minutes, absorbing the pure oxygen gratefully.

"Dan, I'm willing to call it a job on that first cave. What do you say? Shall we tackle number two?"

"Right-o! We're not beaten yet, old son."

Smale meditatively reviewed the situation.

"That map can't be wrong," he decided. "They started after us the moment they

missed it—in *force!* If it was only the two sacks of gold they were trying to recover the old trader and his manager might tackle the job, but when a big party of Batatekes take a hand in the game it's a cinch that they're nervous about something more than a bag of dust."

The Irishman stared up the rocky valley along which they had come. "Talking of that," he said, "how far behind us do you suppose they are?"

The Boer knitted his brows and did some rough figuring.

"When we left the factory afire we had a clear twenty-four hours' start of them. They've been cutting that down ever since, thanks to your young lady and that confounded litter. I suppose we're lucky if we're ten hours ahead of them now."

Burk agreed with this calculation. He glanced uneasily at the sun.

"We've been here three hours," he said, "and we've either got to find that gold and vamose before dawn, or make up our minds to a pitched battle."

The Boer looked around him at the barren wilderness of rocks and hills.

"A rotten place for a scrap," he muttered. "Five men might hide behind these kopjes and kill off fifty before ever they were spotted. I hope Lombo has had sense enough to post good lookouts."

"There is no such thing as a good African sentry," corrected Burk gloomily. "The best of 'em sleep a little lighter than the others, that's all."

He led the way back to work.

If the air had been stifling in the first cave, it was infernal in the second, which was smaller. The savages had lost the fine edge of their initial enthusiasm and did not work quite so energetically, but nevertheless the floor was soon turned over to a depth of two feet, when solid rock was encountered. Smale scrutinized the walls with no greater success than before.

"Dan," he muttered, "I'm afraid we've drawn a blank."

The Irishman raised a lantern and moved slowly about the cave, casting the light upon every square foot of the scattered rubble. Finally he dropped his tired arm with a grunt of disgust.

"It beats me!" he said bitterly.

The Africans were quick to catch the sense of his remark. They drew off to one end of the cave, behind Lombo and Anoka, their position either by accident or design cutting off the two whites from the passage to the outer cave. The savages were plainly sulky, grumbling among themselves, fingering their tools and weapons, and casting inquisitive looks at their leaders.

Burk and Smale felt the tenseness of the moment. They were outnumbered more than ten to one, and several of the Bololos were armed with ancient muzzle loaders that might prove painfully effective at such a short range. The hands of the two adventurers went to their revolvers in readiness for trouble.

"If they start anything," cautioned Smale quietly, "drop on your face, douse the glim, and fire low."

Lombo, drawn off from his men, consulted with Anoka. For two or three minutes they talked earnestly, and then the bulky black fastened his gaze on the Boer.

"Him gold no lib for here," he stated conclusively. "What you do now? Batatekes come quick. Den much fight. When no gold and much fight me t'ink um damn fool business."

Burk scratched his chin. "There is a great deal of forceful logic and sound philosophy," he said, "in the brief but accurate summary of the situation vouchsafed by our astute, if uncultured friend, who has just spoken?. What's the answer, Piet?"

Smale, fearful of treachery, never took his eyes from Lombo.

"You make me much trouble," went on the chief with open insolence. "Me go for Gama; you stay here, or go hell. Me take white girl for dash for my trouble."

"What!" Burk exploded with a roar of anger that thundered about their ears as it reverberated from wall to wall. He snatched his revolver from his belt, and in another second there would have been a battle royal if the Boer had not seized his friend's wrist in a grip of steel.

"Chop it, Dan," he commanded brusquely. "We still have another shot in the locker." He turned a resolute face to the

Bololo chief and motioned with his hand. "Tell your men to go outside," he ordered grimly, "and go with them yourself or it will be the worse for you. I have a plan that I will tell you later."

Lombo hesitated. He glanced sullenly from Smale to his warriors, as though estimating the probable consequences of a flat refusal. It was not in him, however, to disobey an order so sternly given by a white man, and perhaps he reflected that his own body would be an uncomfortably large target in a rough and tumble fire at close quarters in the dark; indeed, he was none too sure that one of his own men would pass by such a golden opportunity to even old scores by an accidental thrust of his spear.

He grunted an affirmative, muttered a few words to Anoka, and dropped clumsily to his hands and knees. He led the way through the passage and his men crawled after him, none of them anxious to be the last. It was a grotesque sight, like nothing so much as cattle milling at the gate of a pen, and Burk was moved to laughter.

He grew serious enough the moment he and his partner found themselves alone, with a single lantern to light them.

"Tell me your scheme, Piet, and heaven send it's a good one!"

"We'll get out of here first," snapped the Boer, "before it occurs to Anoka to tumble a rock in front of the exit, or build a fire that will smoke us like a couple of hams."

He drew a sigh of genuine relief when they stood again in the sunshine of the outer world. "I have a hunch that we're well out of that, Dan. Come along up here."

A steep rock raised its bulk not far from the entrance to the cave, and a faint indication of a path ran up its side to the summit. It was this that had caught the Boer's quick eye, and they followed it pantingly to the top. The sun was sufficiently low to be endurable, and they settled themselves cross-legged, with their rifles close beside them.

Before them, within easy view and easy shot, lay the encampment, a circumstance that the wily Smale doubtless had in mind when he selected the eminence as the site for their conference. Celia Holden's tent gleamed white against the shadowy, purple background of rocks, and as they looked at it she came out and seated herself in the sunlight.

"There," said Smale, nodding toward the girl, "is my plan!"

"What do you mean?"

"Our one trump card," answered the Boer with satisfaction. "I don't know how much you care for the girl, Dan, but unless you've gone clean off your chump you won't prefer her to a fortune in gold dust.

"The stuff is somewhere about here, but we can't find it—certainly not in a hurry, anyhow. But early to-morrow morning, according to my way of reckoning, we're due to receive a crowd of callers headed by two men who want our blood, and want it badly. We're near the Batateke country, too, and we don't know how many reënforcements they may dig up, so even if we could hold them off for a time we couldn't do it forever. Our fat's in the fire once they catch up with us—and there's only one way to stop 'em!"

"Well?"

"A knife at the girl's throat," said the Boer succinctly.

Burk had guessed as much. He stared across the distance at the slim figure of Celia Holden, and in all his life he could not remember wanting anything so much as he wanted her.

"A knife at her throat," he repeated slowly. "That's all right, Piet, but it mustn't cut—not one scratch."

"Just as you say," conceded Smale, with a curious stare at his friend. "Of course, her father and Rushton needn't know that."

"What's your idea?"

"A note to them—wherever they are. Offering to swap the girl for the Batateke gold. Give 'em to understand that while they're making up their minds to do the handsome by us they must stay exactly where they are; if they break camp it will be the signal for the girl's death—or, better yet, for her sale into slavery. I think, Dan, that they will see the force of our position."

"It's worth trying," admitted Burk. "And Lombo?"

"He will have to horn in on the loot," said Smale sadly. "We need him in our business, and we can't afford to scrap with him. He's in an ugly mood now. You heard his threat, in the cave, to take the girl!"

"He's a low ruffian," said the Irishman virtuously. "I'd have split his skull with a bullet that very minute if you hadn't grabbed my wrist." His face clouded sorrowfully at thought of the lost opportunity. Then he addressed himself to the work in hand, and after a search through his pockets he produced the stub of a pencil and a sheet of dirty paper. "Well—here goes!" he said briskly.

CHAPTER XV.

"JUJU!"

THE note written, Burk and Smale strolled back to the encampment. The sun was touching the top of the hills to the west, and the deepening purple and gray shadows in the depths of the gorge gave warning of approaching dusk. A dozen fires were snapping in sheltered nook where the Bololo chefs were at their simple task, and the boy who had been assigned to the white men had started a blaze for them and was waiting for further instructions. Burk left his comrade to supervise the proper boiling of the coffee while he wandered away to where the girl was sitting.

She greeted him with an expressionless face, but frowned at his opening words.

"I'm just after writing a note to your father," he said. "Is there any message you'd like to send him? The mail closes in a few minutes."

She ignored the suggestion.

"You don't look to me like a man who has just found a fortune," she remarked dryly, searching his face. "Don't tell me you couldn't find the gold after all the trouble you've taken!"

"Nary a sign of it," he admitted ruefully. "That's what I'm writing to your father about; it's disgraceful, in my opinion, that a man of his years and education can't draw a reliable map, and I've told him so."

"I'm sure he'll be distressed at your poor opinion of him! What else did you write?"

"I'll tell ye about that later. First of all, I want to give you an idea of how things stand right here, because as far as these blacks are concerned, you and Piet and meself are all in the same boat—and I'm free to say we're beginning to make heavy weather of it. I don't like the way Lombo is acting, and I particularly don't like the evil eye of that greasy shadow of his, Anoka.

"They've been counting on finding this gold, and probably on taking care of it themselves after relieving us of the responsibility! They haven't accepted the disappointment of their hopes at all in the sporting manner I'd wish to see. There's been some ugly talk. Do you mind if I tell you something that may scare you?"

"I'm not easily scared." She surveyed him coolly. "If any one around here is getting nervous it seems to me it is yourself!"

He had been lounging against a bowlder, but at her contemptuous tone he straightened and his face flushed beneath its tan.

"Faith, and that's unfair! If I'm afraid of anything it's on your account and not me own! You may have guessed that I'm not a man of many virtues, but at least cowardice isn't one of me faults."

"Well, we won't discuss your character—or lack of it. What is your news?"

"Lombo is discouraged, and sore. He thinks he's had a lot of trouble for nothing—and I won't say he's not right—and he suggests that by way of a small recompense he be allowed to sell you to an Arab slaver that he knows."

Silence fell between them. The girl avoided the man's eyes and stared across the valley, while hot and cold waves alternately swept her body. Africa with all its refinements and gradations of torture has no worse fate for a white woman than sale into captivity, and in spite of her courage Celia's brain reeled back from the contemplation of that fate for her own. It was

minutes before she could trust herself to speak.

"Would you permit such a thing?" she asked in a low voice. "Is it possible you have sunk as low as *that?*"

"No! So help me Heaven, Miss Celia, I'm not that bad! While I live no man on earth shall take you from me."

"Oh!" She had regained her self-control and he winced at the scornful note in her ejaculation. "I see! I can count upon you to be everything except—unselfish."

"I'm a poor man, me girl. It's easy for them that have everything to be unselfish, but it's not the way for a pauper to get anything out of a hard world. Whatever I've had from life I've had to *take,* an' I don't suppose I'll have any different luck to the day of me death. But that's not here or there! We've got the rest of our lives to discuss theoretical ethics; what concerns us now is the fix we're in."

"Doesn't Lombo realize that if he harms me he and all his tribe will pay the penalty? M'Buli, the chief of the Batatekes, is blood brother to my father, and will help him take a terrible revenge."

"H-m. You can't expect an African savage to worry about the future. He acts as he pleases, and blames it on his gods if retribution overtakes him. No use trying to threaten Lombo."

"To what extent, then, will you protect me? I'd like to know just where I'm at!"

"Where you're 'at'?" He chuckled over the graphic American idiom that he had never heard before, and then looked up at the sound of a step behind him.

It was Smale, and he ducked his head politely to Celia.

"Chow," he announced amiably. "Will you share our evening repast, Miss Holden?"

Burk rose to his feet, grinning. "Quite the Lord Chesterfield — what? It's wonderful to see the effect of the society of a gentle woman on a rude beast of the field! Where's your dinner jacket, Piet?"

"My rascally man failed to lay it out," drawled the Boer, falling in with his friend's humor. "The beggar's drunk again, no doubt."

He was evidently in much better spirits than when they returned to the camp, and presently he voiced the reason. "Lombo approves of our latest scheme. He'll send our letter to Holden and wait to see what happens." He broke off to point to an approaching Bololo. "Here's the messenger now, I guess."

Burk drew the note from his pocket, and observed that the girl's eyes rested upon it curiously. "Want to read it?" he asked.

She accepted it from his outstretched hand. It was brief, and she grasped its contents at a glance. She looked up and encountered his mocking gaze. "So you *will* give me up—at a price!"

"I get the price first," he pointed out grimly. "After that—"

He did not finish his sentence, leaving her to read his mind as she chose. It did not seem to her very difficult reading; he would get his price, and then he would consider whether or not to fulfill his share of the bargain. A double-dealing, double-eyed scoundrel, with not a single redeeming feature! An angry impulse seized her.

"Will you let me add a few words—or are you afraid?"

"Write what you please," he answered carelessly, and fished in his pocket for the pencil.

"Don't be a fool *all* the time, Dan!" said the Boer crossly.

Burk disregarded the protest. He found his pencil and handed it to the girl, who scribbled rapidly for a moment.

"There!" she said defiantly, and gave him back the note.

"You'll excuse me if I pry into your correspondence?" he asked politely. He read aloud:

> "Don't worry about me. Am well and able to take care of myself. I'm not afraid of all the blacks in Africa, nor of any white cutthroat. Come as quickly as you can. Love.
>
> "CELIA."

"Tear it off!" growled Smale.

"Pooh! Let her rave. What difference does it make?" He beckoned to the messenger. "Here, boy! You bring answer quick, I dash you one bottle gin. You savvy?"

The runner flashed his teeth in a grin of

comprehension, and pointed to the disappearing sun. "Me come back with him!" he promised, and put the letter into his waist cloth.

"I like my dinner hot," complained the Boer when this business was finished. "If you're quite through fooling—"

"Come on, little man!" cried the Irishman gayly. "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we may—"

"To-morrow we may have something more important to think about," interrupted Smale. "By the way, Dan, I guess we'd better keep watch and watch to-night."

"Just as you say," agreed his partner.

"What are you going to watch?" asked Celia.

The Boer eyed her almost affectionately. "Yourself, young lady. You're the only piece of good luck we's got left, and I'm not going to let any one steal you."

On the whole, she welcomed the news. The one thing she had always feared was an act of treachery that would find her helpless. If Lombo drugged her food—and she had to eat—or if his warriors stole into her tent at night—and she had to sleep—she would have no opportunity to use the revolver that was her one defense.

She was glad that Smale prepared their food, for she correctly surmised that the Boer would give Lombo no opportunity to tamper with the provisions, and now she was relieved to think that her slumbers were to be guarded. When she drew her blankets about her that night she welcomed the sound of the Boer's footsteps as he took up his new duty before the flap of her tent.

There was one person abroad that night whom the Boer with all his vigilance did not detect.

When silence had fallen upon the camp Anoka, driven to restlessness by the twin spirits of greed and ignoble ambition, rose from his sleeping place and slipped softly away into the darkness. His destination was the cave, his object to locate the gold. It would be a great feather in his cap if he should succeed where others had failed, especially if on the morrow, with appropriate mumbo-jumbo, he should reveal the secret to his companions and triumphantly proclaim it to be a demonstration of his juju. His fame as a witch doctor would spread far and wide through all the Congo!

The moon was up, but not high enough to send its light into the deep cañon. He was forced to pick his path carefully, testing the ground with his bare foot at every step before trusting his weight to it. Yet his progress through the dark was made as silently as a kitten walks on cotton wool. A white man following him even by daylight would have discharged an avalanche of noisy pebbles with his every movement; Anoka did not disturb a single stone. He found the cave without any difficulty, and, stepping just inside the entrance, he stood still a minute listening. Not a sound came to his ears; the silence, like the inky darkness, could almost be felt. He stumbled across the broken earth of the floor until he reached one of the farther corners of the outer chamber, and here he groped about with his fingers until they closed upon a small lantern that he had thoughtfully secreted there earlier in the day.

He paused before lighting it, standing with an open matchbox in his hand. For no reason at all fear, ghastly fear, had claimed him for a victim. The hair on his scalp began to prickle, his knees shook, his lips trembled. A cold perspiration broke out all over his body, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He was utterly unable to ascribe any cause to his condition; it was just the unreasoning but potent instinct of an animal that signaled danger from his senses to his brain. It seemed to him that anything was preferable to this horrible blackness in which he was helpless to see aught that threatened. With shaking hands he contrived to strike a match and touch it to the wick of his lantern.

He regained some of his courage with the lifting of the shadows. A quick glance showed him that the cave was empty of any living creature save himself, but he still kept his back pressed against the wall until he had fully recovered his nerve. At last he drew a long breath and gave his attention to the business upon which he was bent.

He wasted no more than a cursory glance on the chamber in which he stood; he had long since concluded that no one with any sense would hide a treasure there when the inner cave offered an even more secure and remote place for its concealment. He dropped to his hands and knees at the entrance to the passage connecting the two caves, and crawled in, the lantern swinging from its handle that was clenched between his teeth.

He had nearly reached the farther end of the low tunnel when an astonishing thing happened. There was not a breath of air stirring in the cave, much less a current, yet the flame of the lantern shot up as if a breeze had caught it, flared and guttered for an instant—and went out. The heavy pall of blackness settled once more on the terrified Anoka as he crouched upon the ground.

"Juju!" he muttered between chattering teeth.

His courage was spent, his researches ended for the night. Not for all the gold in Africa would he spend another moment in that uncanny spot. He began, with infinite stealth, to creep backward. Instantly the silence was shattered by a fearsome sound from the passage behind him—the angry snarl of a big cat. A leopard! Here was a tangible cause for alarm, and his superstitious fears were temporarily dissipated.

He plunged desperately ahead, reached the end of the tunnel, and struggled to his feet in the second cave. He got his back to a wall and stood breathing in short, painful gasps, while his trembling fingers plucked a keen knife from his girdle. The lantern he had dropped in the passage. He was presently conscious that not one leopard, but a number of them, had followed him; the dark space before him was filled with soft-moving forms whose outlines it was impossible to distinguish. They paced to and fro ceaselessly, on velvet paws, the quiet air gently stirred by the slow passage of their bodies. A faint, animal smell rose to the man's nostrils.

Nothing happened beyond that, and after a long period of agonized waiting Anoka bethought himself of the matches that were still in his loin cloth. Fire was his best protection, and by supreme effort of the will he managed to drag out the box and scrape one of the matches along its edge. It flared up bravely, but before he could shield the tiny flame, before he could even shoot one look about him, it was puffed out.

A deep voice spoke from across the cave, its gruff notes filling the small chamber with a volume of sound.

"The breath of my spirit is strong, Anoka!" it said.

The Bololo, a victim now to the same terror he had so often inspired in others, sank to his knees upon the soft earth.

"Your magic is greater than mine, master!" he quavered.

"Stay where you are, Anoka. Move not, lest those about you leap and destroy. Do not think to deceive them—or me. The darkness does not blind our sight; see, even now I am observing you."

Anoka looked up fearfully. Fascinated, he watched two luminous balls of green light shape themselves into the semblance of a pair of huge eyes in the darkness across the cave. The spectacle destroyed the last vestige of his courage, and as the eyes faded away again he dropped the knife that he had clutched and covered his face with both hands.

"What do you wish of me, master?"

"Nothing, Anoka. My spirit summoned you here to tell you certain things that you should know. There are two white men in the camp of your chief, and it is against them that I wish to warn you."

The fetish doctor pricked up his ears and breathed more freely. To do him justice, he was as brave as the ordinary savage, and since no immediate danger seemed to threaten him his shrewd mind jumped eagerly at the chance to obtain information that might prove valuable.

"Who are you, master, that knows all things?"

"I am C'Wayo—C'Wayo, the leopard!"

The mention of that dreaded name was greeted by a tremendous uproar that nearly deafened the Bololo. It seemed to him that every leopard in the Congo was before him in the darkness, adding its terrible

roar to the chorus of salute. When the unearthly din had ceased Anoka withdrew the hands that he had clapped to his ears. He shivered convulsively in every limb as he shrank his body into as small a space as possible, lest it invite a ripping blow from one of the great cats that apparently hemmed him in.

" Fear not, Anoka. These are but my servants, who come and go at my will. If it will bring more peace to your mind I will order them hence. Stand back from the passage, Anoka—and stand quiet!"

The Bololo needed no second bidding. He shrank against the wall and held his breath as he listened to that dread procession file past him in the dark. When the sound of the last footfall had died away he drew a long, thankful sigh and wiped a brow that was clammy.

" Now, let us talk of more serious matters, Anoka. I have said that I would caution you against these white men, who bring evil in their trail. Mark my words carefully, and thereafter counsel Lombo to rid himself of them. They have done great wrong to my friend M'Buli; they have brought sorrow to that good man, the American, his blood brother; they have foully wronged *you,* Anoka! Only blood can atone for their crime against you!"

" Against me?" demanded Anoka, mystified. " What harm have they done to me, who scarcely know them?"

" Where is your son? Where is the babe for whom his mother gave her life; the child that grew to be your pride; the youth whose courage was that of the lion; the man whose wisdom was that of the serpent? Where is he, Anoka?"

An icy spasm contracted the Bololo's heart; a greater fear than he had ever known before clutched at his breast. He answered with difficulty. " He went north on an errand for his chief, who rightly trusts him. Four moons ago he left; he should have returned—before—this."

" He will never return, Anoka."

For some minutes no further word was spoken. Anoka did not dream of questioning the other's truthfulness. Despair weighed him down, holding him speechless, until it slowly gave way to a savage anger.

" What—do—you mean?" he whispered. " Those white men—"

" Shall I show you how it happened?" The voice in the darkness was almost gentle.

" Yes."

C'Wayo rose from his place and moved across the cave until he reached Anoka's side. There he sat down, and took one of the man's hands between his own.

" Shut your eyes," he commanded, " and watch well."

Anoka obeyed—and uttered a cry of astonishment.

The moment his eyelids closed he found himself standing in the open country, bathed in the warm rays of an afternoon sun. He appeared to be on the crest of a low, wooded hill, close to a trail that ran down its side into the valley below. He followed it with his gaze, and saw in the distance the roofs of a village.

" Gama!" he exclaimed.

In the excitement of that recognition he carelessly opened his eyes, and immediately lost the vision. He shut them again hastily, and instantly regained it.

This time he was aware, in some curious fashion, of the approach of men. He looked back and saw three figures climbing the hill; as they drew nearer he recognized two of them as the white men who had brought the tale of gold to Gama; the third —his son. *His son!*

They passed so close that he could have reached out and touched them, but they saw him not. He watched while they halted for a breathing spell, throwing their packs upon the ground. His son, still laden with a heavy sack, pointed to the distant village and turned to the white men with a smiling remark whose meaning was clear. The shorter of the two seemed to answer him, though Anoka could not catch the words, and whatever he said brought an expression of alarm to the face of the boy. He turned like a frightened deer, and ran toward the bushes that fringed the trail. The white man pursued him with lifted rifle. In another instant the blow had gone home, crashing against the boy's skull. He threw up his arms and fell. Anoka flung out his hands to catch him.

The scene vanished abruptly. Anoka, however, did not open his eyes. He sat in silent misery, while bitter grief and anger gnawed at his heart. It was some time before C'Wayo spoke.

"You saw?"

"Yes. My boy—"

"Twice," went on C'Wayo reminiscently, "the short white man has been within easy spear-thrust of me. I could have killed him—but left him for you. Was that right, Anoka?"

"It was most kindly thought of," answered Anoka in a choking voice.

C'Wayo came to his feet. "I must leave you now. Hearken, Anoka! The gold you seek is indeed here, but hidden so cunningly that no man may hope to find it unless he know the secret. Waste no more time in foolish search. Destroy the men who have wronged you, and listen no more to the singing of strangers, however sweet their song. Here is your lantern, which I picked up as I came on your heels through the passage."

Anoka felt the lantern thrust into his hand. He heard no movement from C'Wayo, but when he finally summoned the resolution to strike a light he found himself alone in the cave.

He obeyed C'Wayo's injunction to lose no more time in a futile hunt for the gold—a decision that he reached all the more easily as he reflected that such an attempt might bring about the return of that uncomfortable person with his dangerous pets. He stooped to enter the passage, and uttered an involuntary cry of astonishment. He bent still lower, his gaze glued to the earthen floor as it lay clearly revealed in the rays of the lantern.

Of all the leopards that had passed him in the dark, not one had left a track.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NOTE IS ACKNOWLEDGED.

CELIA was aroused at dawn by the stir and bustle of the awakening camp. She came out of her tent to find Burk and Smale, both heavy lidded from the watches of the night, preparing breakfast just outside of the flimsy canvas structure. She welcomed their proximity, however selfish might be the motives that actuated it, as a sign that they were still standing between her and any danger from the disappointed savages.

The Irishman greeted her with a cheery salutation and invited her to "draw up her chair," which she correctly interpreted as a suggestion that she should find the softest rock in the neighborhood for her seat. Smale, on the contrary, barely nodded to her, and devoted all his attention to the mystic rites he was performing over a doubtful egg that struggled to escape from the frying-pan. He seemed glummer than ever, and his companion was moved to apologize for him.

"He's the victim of a presentiment, Miss Celia—what you Americans would call a hunch. He's been seeing ghosts, among other visions. You'll excuse him if he does not join in our light breakfast chatter?"

"I certainly saw a native dodging about among those rocks over there," said the Boer, goaded into defending himself. He waved his hand toward the farther side of the valley. "Lombo believes me, even if this six-foot-three monument of stupidity doesn't; there's a search party out for my 'ghost' this very minute."

The girl experienced a moment of fear, which she as quickly dismissed. C'Wayo, if it were he, was more that a match for a score of these slow-witted Bololos. He would not be caught.

"What else is worrying you?" she asked, determined not to show a suspicious amount of interest in the tale of a strange native.

"Well, Lombo and Anoka had a long palaver at the crack o' dawn, and they came away from it looking as bitter as gall," answered Burk for his friend. "Piet doesn't like Anoka this morning—do you, old son?"

"Scum of hell!" growled the Boer.

"Sh! Not before the pretty lady, Piet."

"He's cooking up something," grumbled Smale. "If ever I saw murder in a man's eye, I saw it this morning. Only it wasn't clean, honest murder; it was death by slow torture, the way these devils know how to do it."

"Listen to that now!" urged the Irishman admiringly. "Would you expect to find that much imagination in a spalpeen of a Boer, Miss Celia?"

She looked at the speaker thoughtfully.

"Your joking isn't very convincing," she said. "Are you trying to conceal something from me? Yesterday you told me that we were all in the same boat. Don't you think I'd be a far more useful member of the crew if you told me the whole truth?"

"There's nothing to tell, Miss Celia. As for my joking, that's the nature of an Irishman when he thinks there's the prospect of a tidy scrap; we're never more cheerful than when we're polishing our shillalahs for the fair."

"Then, do you expect trouble?"

"The poet tells us that man is born to it," he answered enigmatically. "But there is one thing I'll promise you; you'll not stir far from my side this day."

"What sort of trouble?" she persisted.

A hope was rising in her breast that he had had news of the rapid advance of Fred and the Batatekes. She glanced longingly toward the hills to the east, but nothing met her gaze except the solitary figure of a Bololo sentry, silhouetted against the turquoise sky.

"We've heard nothing from your father," snapped Burk, reading her thoughts, "nor from your young man, either. Faith, and I'd hate to be in that lad's shoes, Miss Celia! He's got to decide whether he'll take our threat lying down, which would annoy any man, or he's got to keep coming and—risk your life! A pretty problem! Which will he do, d'ye think?"

She raised her head proudly to meet his challenging eyes.

"He knows me too well to hesitate!"

Burk rose to his feet with a sigh.

"Whatever he does, he'll never be worthy of a girl of your spirit!" His eyes twinkled as he turned to his partner in crime. "Piet, 'twas a piece of reprehensible carelessness that we didn't bag a priest along with the young lady, here. Faith, I'm getting impatient for the ceremony!"

The girl looked away, biting her lips. "When you talk like that," she said, "you only make me realize what a fine gentleman Anoka is."

It was a shrewder hit than she knew. Burk flushed, paled, and stared blankly across the valley. He saw nothing of the gray stones or the blue skies, but only the memory of a black boy's eyes set in a countenance twisted by pain and contempt. He heard again the biting words: "Me English boy! You—scum!"

"Damned if the verdict isn't getting to be unanimous!" he muttered to himself, trying hard to recover his self-esteem. The effort was vain. His features were grimly set as he swung upon Smale, ignoring the girl. "Time to be moving, Piet. Are you all ready?"

"Aye—ready!"

The Boer picked up his rifle and heavy cartridge belt. He volunteered a few words of explanation to Celia. "We've decided to pull out until the air clears a bit. If your young man, or your father, doesn't come through with the combination of the safe, Lombo may get rough. So we're going to spend the day at the caves, where we'll take a lot of getting at in case of trouble."

"And what about me?"

He seemed to rebuke her stupidity with his impatient glance. "We'd be likely to leave you, wouldn't we? You're still our one piece of good luck. Come on."

Menacing looks followed them as they left the camp. Lombo and Anoka, standing apart by themselves, appeared fully as murderously inclined as Smale had described them, but they gave no signal to interfere with the little party of whites. No doubt they realized who would be the first targets in the event of open warfare, and were not anxious to risk their lives in a dangerous attempt at revenge.

Burk led the way direct to the cave, setting a pace that forbade conversation, and after the uncomfortable walk over the smooth and treacherous rocks they were glad enough to throw themselves breathlessly on the cool earth within the entrance. Celia looked around her curiously, smiling a little at the scarified surface of the ground. The same amount of labor, she thought, would have turned up a good-sized field for planting.

"Here comes a boy," said Smale abruptly. He was standing by the entrance to the cave, where Celia and the Irishman joined him. Together they watched the figure of a runner approaching from the camp, and when he drew nearer they saw that he had held something white in his hand.

"The answer from your father!" exclaimed Burk, a note of excitement in his voice.

He strolled out to meet the messenger, and the two in the cave saw him snatch the paper from the boy and spread it open. He was back in a moment, his face inscrutable. He handed the note to the Boer, who read it slowly and gave a deep snort. He stood lost in thought, twisting the paper between his strong, brown fingers.

"I'm still in the same boat," Celia reminded them softly.

In her eagerness to learn the news she thoughtlessly placed her hand on Burk's arm to attract his attention. He looked down at it and flashed her a quick smile as she hurriedly withdrew it.

"Here!" he said, his gayety suddenly restored. "Where are your manners, Piet?" He seized the missive and handed it to Celia. She read aloud:

> "I have received your note, and I will promise you only one thing. If any harm comes to Miss Holden, I will hang you to the highest tree in Africa.
>
> "F. RUSHTON."

She thrust the paper into the pocket of her jacket and raised a pair of shining eyes to Burk. "Well," she said, "now that you've got your answer, what do you think of it?"

"Not bad for a youngster," he admitted carelessly. "A bit on the rodomontade side, perhaps. By the way, how does he come to write instead of your father?"

The same question had occurred to her. She remembered that C'Wayo had spoken of her father and mother as both being in Mafadi; it was obvious that Fred must be alone with the Batatekes. Still, it would never do to tell these men that the pursuing force was one good shot weaker than they believed it; she was conscious of Smale's shrewd stare while she cudgeled her brains for an answer, and fortunately for her there came an interruption as startling as it was unexpected.

The two men and the girl stood frozen in their tracks, staring speechlessly at one another, as the distant report of a rifle racketed through the cañon, echoing between the rocky walls. Burk was the first to recover his wits.

"Howly St. Patrick, what is it now?"

He tore from the cave and raced to the top of the low hills, where he and Smale had foregathered on the previous afternoon. He was staring toward the camp, shading his eyes with his hands, when Celia and the Boer came up beside him.

"I'd give something for a pair of binoculars," he muttered by way of greeting. "All I can make out is that the Bololo sentry to the east has disappeared. I suppose he must have fired that shot as a warning, though I don't know what scared him. Look at the camp, will you? It's like a hoorah's nest!"

They followed his eyes and saw that the savages were scurrying to and fro like a flock of chickens panic-stricken by a hawk. It seemed a long time before their activities resolved themselves into anything resembling method, but then their tactics drew a grunt of approval from the Boer. They crossed the dry bed of the river in a body, their arms full of equipment, and proceeded to take cover behind the great kopjes that edged its bank.

"That's not so moldy," said Burk. "They know a thing or two, these chaps. You see, Miss Celia, they've got that nasty stretch of river bottom in front of them now, and they can do a snappy lot of sniping while any one is crossing it to get at them. Meanwhile, they're sheltered behind those bowlders—and they've brought water and provisions in case they have to stand a siege."

"Hello!" interrupted Smale. "Here's the other crowd!"

A number of figures appeared over the crest of the hills to the east and north and commenced to work their way down into the valley. Their progress was slow, for the descent was by no means easy, and they

tried to combine safety with progress by slipping behind every rock that promised protection. They grew bolder as they found that the Bololos did not open fire.

"Saving their powder for close quarters," commented Burk. "Even Anoka, with all his magic, couldn't get a bullet home at that range with the rusty old trade guns they've got." He lifted his own rifle and adjusted the sights. "What do you make it from here, Piet?"

"Three hundred," answered the Boer curtly.

Celia, unnoticed by the two men, had been edging her way to their rear. As the Irishman busied himself with his rifle she slipped her hand into the pocket of her coat and gripped the butt of her revolver. Her heart beat violently as she realized that the outcome of the impending battle might easily hang upon her own courage and determination.

With their white allies placed *hors de combat,* the Bololos could not offer an effective resistance to the Batateke warriors —and it was in her own power to compel these men to drop their weapons at the point of her gun. Fate had dealt her a high card, and she was exultantly nerving herself to play it when an ejaculation from the Irishman checked her plan and relaxed her tension.

"I say! What sort of a show is this? These beggars are never the Holden outfit!"

Smale peered intently across the valley, and an expression of disgust spread over his countenance.

"Hell! They're Arabs!" he cried.

Burk whistled. "Arabs is right. But they are friendly to Lombo."

"Don't look like it now," drawled the Boer.

Firing had suddenly commenced on both sides, with absurdly little effect. The Arabs seemed to have more firearms than their foes, but after watching them a minute Burk was able to pronounce their aim from ten to thirty feet high.

The two adventurers were no less than astounded by this unexpected outbreak of hostilities between birds of a feather who had hitherto been on the best of terms. They had no way of guessing that they were watching the result of C'Wayo's essay in Machiavellian diplomacy—and they would have been stricken speechless with surprise had they known that it was themselves, and the girl beside them, who were the objects of this unexpected foray. It was not until later that they learned how narrow had been their escape; the preliminary shot which they had heard had been fired at the Bololo sentry by a hot-headed youngster in El Rassan's band, thus spoiling a very pretty plan for a surprise attack.

"It's a bit of all right for us," said the Boer complacently, after a moment's consideration. "They'll wipe out a few Bololos for us, anyway."

He raised his rifle as he spoke and sighted along its barrel.

"What are you doing?" demanded Burk.

"I never miss a good chance for target practice," answered the Boer serenely. He pressed his trigger. "Got him!" he announced with satisfaction. "Get busy, Dan. If the Arabs clean up the Bololos, we'll be worse off than we are now—and if I don't miss my guess we'll have our hands full beating off these blighters as it it. Sacred name of a sacred swine! Look at them come!"

More figures had appeared over the distant hills and were hurrying down to reënforce their predecessors. Burk estimated that their addition would bring the number of the attacking party up to one hundred and fifty.

Before settling down to serious work he placed Celia in a position where she could watch the struggle with a minimum chance of being hit by any bullet that might come in their direction, and for the succeeding half hour she had a view of a battle such as few women are privileged to see.

The Arabs displayed extraordinary courage, considering that they were forced to a pitched battle instead of an easy coup. Twice they charged across the rocky bed of the river, and twice they were driven back by the Bololo fire and the steady execution of the white men's rifles. They rushed a third time, and managed to reach the Bololos' position.

A savage mêlée ensued, both sides adopt-

ing hand-to-hand tactics, although a few of the Arabs still used their rifles and revolvers. One man in particular, a tall fellow attired in a white burnoose with a bright-red turban, stood on the edge of the fray and methodically blazed away at the Bololos as fast as he could load and fire his weapon. It was not long before Piet Smale noticed him with deadly interest.

"Dan! Try your luck on his nibs with the red hat. He is getting too almighty important in this show!"

They concentrated their fire upon the unconscious victim of their lethal regard, and Celia Holden gave a low cry, a moment later, as she saw the white figure reel and stagger and collapse upon the ground.

"That's torn it!" exclaimed Burk almost instantly. "That must have been the leader of the johnnies."

His surmise, apparently, was correct. Three of his comrades rushed to the fallen man's side and caught him up in their arms. They bore him hurriedly across the river bed, the remainder of the Arabs following more slowly and keeping up a brisk fire to cover their retreat.

They were permitted to withdraw unmolested. The Bololos had no stomach for further fighting, and the white men preferred to save their ammunition now that the victory was won.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLANS AND COUNTER-PLANS.

THE girl could hardly realize that she had watched a pitched battle between two sets of desperate men. The descent of the Arabs had been so swift and unexpected, and their withdrawal so equally hasty, that she might have believed it all a dream but for the acrid smell of burned powder that clung to her hair and clothes, and the distant figures, white and black, that dotted the field of battle.

"Have they really gone?" she asked after an interval.

"With their tails between their legs," answered Burk complacently. "And they will not come back in a hurry for more."

Smale caught his friend's eye and sent him a meaning look. "It's pretty hot upon this rock, Dan. Why don't we go back to the cave again and keep out of the sun?"

"Right-o! After you, Miss Celia, and mind where you put your pretty feet on this blasted trail."

He had taken his partner's hint and acted upon it promptly. The rock on which they had been perched commanded entirely too good a view of a stage that was set for a grim drama, and the after-scenes of an African battle are not for a woman to witness. The Congolese, finding life difficult enough, do not care to assume additional burdens, and a badly wounded man is very much of a burden indeed.

They dispose of the matter with simple directness; if a man can walk, well and good; if he can't, then a knock on the head or the thrust of a spear saves everybody, including the victim himself, a lot of trouble. Burk had no reason to believe that Lombo had founded a Red Cross chapter as an integral part of the Bololo civilization, and the big adventurer was grateful to the rough Boer for his consideration of the girl's feelings.

"Lombo will be in a sweet frame of mind over this," commented Burk soberly, as they settled themselves comfortably in the cool depths of the outer cave. "He must have lost a fair handful of his men in that last scrimmage."

Neither Smale nor Celia thought it necessary to reply to his statement of the obvious. The girl was busy with her own reflections, wondering if the time had come to suggest a scheme of her own devising.

"What next?" continued the Irishman to his partner. "Do we go back to camp—or do we wait here for His Bololoship Lombo the Fat, to make the next move? It's a nice question."

"With one answer," replied the Boer briefly. "We have neither food nor water here, and we're in no position to antagonize the Bololos. This young lady's crowd may blow in at any minute, and with a scrap of that size on my hands I'd a deal rather have Lombo at my back than on my neck."

"Your anatomical preferences are quite understandable," laughed Burk. "After

all, we must be in slightly better odor with Lombo just now. He can't blame us for this last rookus, and he ought to be grateful to us for the neat lot of Arabs we knocked over."

Celia caught him up quickly, determined to test her own plan.

"Gratitude from a Bololo? I've never heard of such a thing! If you two men are reduced to counting on the possible good will of an African savage, it begins to look as if you'd made a terrible mess of things."

"Don't rub it in," begged the Irishman.

"I suppose it is a little unkind—especially coming from me," she answered sweetly. "When you consider all you've done for me, you naturally expect nothing but womanly sympathy from me in your hour of trouble."

"Be reasonable," said Burk.

"You men have got an awful lot to answer for," went on the girl. "You've turned this part of the Congo upside down; you've made an enemy of every soul you have met; you have left a trail of death and destruction, and you haven't found the gold that has caused so much suffering. Really, it seems to me that the whole business has been stupidly mismanaged."

Smale rose suddenly, a trifle pink at the tips of his ears. "This is your tête-à-tête, Dan; I'm movin' out of earshot, myself." He paused to glance at the girl sardonically. "And yet apparently sane men marry 'em! Funny!" He strode to the entrance of the cave, shaking his head sadly.

"Don't mind him, Miss Celia," urged the Irishman. "I told you he was a misogynist."

She refused to be sidetracked into a discussion of Smale.

"Well, what *are* you going to do? You can't very well stay here, and under the present circumstances, wherever you go you are almost certain to be caught. You say we're all in the same boat. Haven't I the right to ask where we're drifting?"

"On the rocks," admitted the man with abrupt conviction.

"Exactly! Then if you realize your danger, why don't you avoid it?"

He stared at her, frankly puzzled. "Why this synopsis of my misspent life? What are you drivin' at, Miss Celia?"

"It ought to be fairly obvious. I'm going to suggest that you follow the one sensible course left to you."

"And that is—"

"Bring food and water to this cave. Send word to—to my father to come as quickly as possible. When he arrives I will tell him that you've protected me from the Bololos—which I suppose is partly true—and I'm sure I can persuade him to let you both go free."

He sprang to his feet, purple with anger. "So that's it! You want me to hand you over to another, and when he says, 'Well done, me man; you can go now,' I'm to touch me hat respectful and step off into the jungle!" He laughed shortly, an ugly expression playing over his twisted features. "Ye don't know me very well yet, me girl, or you wouldn't sit there asking me to play the fool. 'Tis a dangerous game you're trying!"

She was pale with disappointment. She had not counted on getting a prompt acquiescence in her suggestion, although she was firmly convinced that Burk and Smale had really come to the end of their ropes, but neither had she expected such a furious refusal. She had appealed to the Irishman's intelligence without allowing anything for his stubbornness.

She shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

"When I want useless advice I'll know where to come for it," he threw in bitterly. "Meanwhile, be good enough to keep it to yerself!"

Once again they faced each other angrily, and once again it was the voice of Smale that ended the scene.

"Look here, Dan!" he called. "The blacks are breaking camp!"

Burk hurried to join his partner, who grinned faintly at the Irishman's face. "The course o' true love—" he began.

"Shut up!" snapped the other viciously. He cast a quick glance down the cañon. "You're right, Piet. Where are they off to now?"

"Home, sweet home," answered the Boer with decision. He examined his rifle meditatively. "We'd better join the proces-

sion, Dan. We don't want to be found here alone with your lady friend when her daddy comes; he'd surely think the situation compromising."

"Suppose Lombo doesn't want us?"

"Rot! He's not crazy yet. Listen to me, Dan," explained the Boer patiently. "I've thought it all out carefully. We've made a mess of things so far, as I guess you'll admit, but there's no reason why we shouldn't make the most of what we've got left.

"This excursion to the Pallaballa Mountains has been a washout, but we've still got those two sacks of dust that we cached in the stream on the trail to Gama. They'll pan out to close on fifteen thousand dollars if I don't miss my guess, so we haven't done so badly.

"I figure that we'll just mosey along with this crowd as far as Gama. Then we will push along that trail to the Congo, picking up the gold as we go, and head for the coast in as big a canoe as we can beg, borrow or steal.

"Lombo will be glad enough to let us come; don't you fret about that. He's not out of the woods by any manner of means; he's got a pack of red-hot Batatekes on his trail, he's lost a lot of his men to that Arab bunch, and he won't be able to pull himself together until he gets home. Meanwhile he ain't going to turn down the company of a couple of good shots like you and me.

"At the same time, we're in the same fix ourselves. If Holden comes along our goose is cooked, unless the Bololos lend us a hand; so they *got* to help us, even if we have to tell him about the two sacks of gold and promise him a share."

"And the girl?"

"She comes with us—and *stays* with us until we're out of reach of the old man. She's still a pretty good hostage for our skins. But once we're clear of this mess—well, you know what I think about women. My advice will be to send her home—and see that she *goes*."

"Faith, I believe you're right!" sighed the Irishman. "But she's a good girl, Piet, and sometimes she makes me ashamed of meself!"

"There you are!" proclaimed the Boer triumphantly. "One of my worst objections to women; they're always making a man uncomfortable."

"Hello!" cried Burk. "Here comes a boy from the camp!"

They silently watched the approach of the black figure, their minds divided between hope and doubt.

The message, however, justified Smale's forecast of Lombo's attitude. The headman advised them that he was obliged to leave at once for home, he thanked them most graciously for their help in beating off the Arabs, and he politely expressed his hope that he would have their company to Gama, not only to aid him in case of trouble *en route,* but to stay for a period and enjoy his hospitality.

Burk sent the boy on his return trip with a cool and qualified acceptance such as he deemed fitting from one of a superior race. It was not until the Bololo's back was turned that the big man permitted his face to suggest the new hope that filled his heart.

"How's that, Piet?" he demanded gleefully. "By Jove, you were right about the old boy after all!"

"Oh—yes." The Boer's gaze followed the retreating messenger gloomily, but he did not choose to utter the doubts that perplexed him. He really knew no more than Burk about the mental workings of a Congo headman and his fetish doctor, but his shrewder judgment was slower to accept at its face value this sudden change from insolence to courtesy on the part of Lombo. He feared treachery. He particularly disliked that suggestion of staying at Gama and enjoying the chief's hospitality! Going a bit strong, that was!

He shook off his mood and assumed an appearance of cheerfulness, determined not to depress his friend by an exhibition of pessimism that might be unwarranted. "We're in for it now," he mused, "and we've just got to take what comes."

The Irishman had hurried to the cave.

"We're off, Miss Celia!" he cried gayly. "Will you be so good—" He stood aside from the entrance and motioned her to step out.

She rose to her feet, but made no move in the direction he indicated. " Suppose I refuse?"

He laughed carelessly.

" Ye'd be a proper armful for a smaller man," he said, " but no more than a feather-weight to me. Would ye like me to carry ye?"

She flushed and bit her lip. Resistance, she knew, was useless. If she took her courage in both hands and found the nerve to shoot down both these men in cold blood, she would still be left at the mercy of the Bololos—who had none. She walked slowly from the cave, holding her head high and ignoring the low bow that he made as she passed him.

Burk and Smale let her go slightly ahead, while they brought up the rear, discussing their plans in low voices. The outstanding fact that engaged their attention, and puzzled them most, was the non-appearance of the Batatekes and their white leaders.

" Perhaps our ultimatum gave 'em something to think about, after all," murmured the Boer, " though that answer didn't sound like it."

" Maybe the young man is looking for the highest tree in Africa," laughed Burk. " That 'll take a bit of finding, I think."

They were still debating the mystery when they reached the camp and were met by a most deferential headman. Anoka was not in sight.

Had they but known the facts, Rushton's failure to appear boded far worse for them than if he had suddenly burst upon them with his savage allies.

When C'Wayo left the cave after his interview with Anoka he took advantage of the bright moonlight to make his way swiftly across the hills to the south, his destination the Batateke country. As he trotted along at a gait astonishingly rapid for a man of his years he occupied his mind with his favorite diversion of forecasting events and shaping them to serve his own ends. He knew the Bololo temperament so well that he was sure he could make no mistake when it came to guessing their future actions.

He was certain that Anoka would lose no time in telling the story of his wrongs to Lombo, in order to enlist his aid in the matter of securing an adequate revenge. Moreover, he would not fail to embellish the tale of his experiences in the dark, and the superstitious Lombo would forthwith give up all hope of a treasure that was not only difficult to find but was guarded by a juju that commanded respect above all jujus.

Then, decided C'Wayo, the Bololo chief would lose no time in heading for home and repairing the damages caused by his disastrous expedition. Also, he would take the two white men with him; first, to fight for him if necessary, and, second, to wreak some terrible vengeance upon them when their usefulness was ended.

These things seemed such certainties to C'Wayo that he decided to send a message to M'Buli, advising him that the gold was safe and suggesting to him that, instead of coming on to the mountains, he lead his men to some point on the trail which the Bololos must take to Gama, and there arrange an ambush that would break the Bololo power for good.

It was to find a runner to carry this message that C'Wayo came to the country of the Batatekes, and he was very careful in his selection of a man who was both swift and trustworthy. The juju-man dispatched the messenger, bidding him run for his life and the love of his people, and then retraced his steps across the mountains to resume his self-appointed task of keeping in touch with Celia and her captors.

He acted so rapidly, and his messengers made such good speed, that it was only a little after dawn when the news was gasped into the delighted ears of the Batateke chief.

M'Buli, at the moment, was deep in consultation with Fred, who had spent hours of tortured indecision after receiving Burk's note. He writhed with fear of the possible consequences that might befall Celia when her captors received his defiant reply. He had sent it, as the girl had hoped, largely on his knowledge of her character, and encouraged by her scrawl on the letter telling him not to worry about her ability to take care of herself. He knew she had a revolver and was an expert shot, and he took

comfort from the thought of C'Wayo, cunning and resourceful, lying on the outskirts of the Bololo camp and waiting an opportunity to snatch the prisoner from her guards.

Last, but not least, Fred appreciated the value of a stiff bluff at the psychological moment; if this man Burk was expecting a favorable reply to his ultimatum, or at worst a temporizing answer, then an open threat might be calculated to stagger him.

M'Buli had further complicated affairs by making a proposition that did credit to his standard of ethics—or any one else's standard, for that matter. When the nature of Burk's communication had been explained to him he had gone off by himself and thought things over. When he returned his mind was made up, and in a long speech that dwelt on the many benefits he and his tribe had received from the trader he offered to give up the secret of the gold if he could thereby secure the safety of his blood brother's daughter. He said, with dignity, that it would be an action befitting a chief. There Fred agreed with him, and knew a few minutes of terrible temptation before rejecting the headman's selfish offer.

The arrival of C'Wayo's message altered the situation materially, bringing a faint gleam of hope into the darkness of their despair.

M'Buli sprang to action. He knew the route that the Bololos must take to Gama, and he knew exactly the place in which to prepare a cunning ambush. He described to Rushton how the trail, after leaving the Pallaballa Mountains, ran through a long patch of dense jungle watered by several small streams, and just before returning to the open grass country wound its way through a narrow ravine whose rocky walls were too steep for even a cat to climb. M'Buli planned to post his men on the crest of these walls, hold his attack until the last Bololo warrior had entered the defile, and then— A ferocious light sprang to his eyes as he thought of the mortal blow he would deal to his enemies. Even if a few escaped, it would be years before the shattered Bololos could regain their strength.

"How far is this ravine from here?" asked Rushton.

He gathered from the chief's answer that they would be on the ground by nightfall, but the Bololos, having farther to go, would not reach it until after "one sleep." If M'Buli figured their movements correctly, the enemy would reach the trap early in their second day's march. When they did—

At this point M'Buli leaned forward with a meaning smile and patted Rushton's rifle affectionately.

"Plenty game!" he grinned. "Good shootin'!"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

FANS

THE king is in his counting-house
Counting out his money?
The queen is in the parlor
Eating bread and honey?
The maid is in the yard
Hanging up the clothes?
Not that you can notice—
They're all working radios!

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

The Phantom Circuit

By MARC EDMUND JONES

THERE was no question that vital inside information upon the market transactions of the brokerage concern of Bentley, Bois & Bentley on lower Broadway—was leaking to Pitkin & Patrick, of Broad Street, their deadly rivals on the Exchange.

Eileen Norman was the secretary and private stenographer of old man Bois, the active head of the firm. As such she occupied a little office all her own immediately adjacent to the room of her chief. Telephone calls for Merle Bois, whether initiated within the office or from outside, first came to Eileen and were by her transferred to the head of the concern by means of a key at the side of her desk. Callers upon the big boss could reach his private office only through the little room occupied by his secretary. Upon Eileen's young and very attractive and rather capable shoulders rested genuine responsiblity.

To Eileen, therefore, came the first definite acknowledgement of the leak. The buzzer that summoned her to the desk of her chief was imperious, prolonged—indicating, she knew from months of experience—that old man Bois was in choice temper.

"Miss Norman," he barked, almost before she was inside the door, "I want to know just the degree of loyalty you feel toward your employers."

Surprised, she was aware that her eyes went wide and that she colored. "I—I don't understand," she stammered.

The broker studied her for several silent moments with a searching glance. Then his expression softened a bit.

"That's all right," he reassured her. But immediately his expression became hard

once more. "Somehow people outside this organization have been gaining inside information of our plans, and—and the results have been expensive, when we undertook to float the bond issue for the electrification of the Chicago terminal of the Midwestern Central Railroad, it was essential that no word leak out until we had been able to handle a certain amount of preferred stock purchases for that company on the Exchange; yet Pitkin & Patrick, acting for unknown interests, were in ahead of us and bought when we sold short, so that to-day we find ourselves in a pretty mess—"

"You don't think that I—" she began, with a gasp.

"Have been supplying Pitkin & Patrick with their information?" he finished for her. "No, I don't! Nevertheless only you and I, and Bentley, have known the details of our movements upon the Exchange in advance; and for a week or more it has seemed as though knowledge of the details leaked, while this Midwestern Central mess proves it."

"W-what can we do?" Eileen felt a sense of genuine concern.

"Be careful, that's all!" With which Merle Bois dismissed her.

The building occupied by Bentley, Bois & Bentley on lower Broadway was one of the fast disappearing old stone and brick structures which in a former day had been the grace of down town New York. To house the various departments of the concern an entire floor was necessary, and this, a number of years previously, had been completely refurnished in extravagant fashion; the probable reason that Bentley, Bois, & Bentley had never been tempted to move to a more modern building or more advantageous location.

As soon as old man Bois left for the Exchange his secretary deserted her desk and hurried out into the main section of the office. Between the various departments, and separating the rooms of the officials, was a uniform mahogany partition with heavy ground glass panels and an immense amount of hand carved trimming. To secure ventilation the partition was not carried up to the ceiling, but was stopped at a height of about twelve feet, which, with the solidity of the construction, made each office virtually sound proof.

Eileen paused for a moment in the long hallway between the departments. Beyond the private rooms was the bookkeeping department, with separate divisions for customers' accounts and firm transactions. Before her was the brokerage room with the long board for quotations and the tickers. In the corner was the telephone switchboard and the operator—

Eileen dismissed the thought that came to her almost as quickly as it found lodgment in her mind. Not only was the operator a trusted employee of many years' service, but she was an elderly woman in whom old man Bois was personally interested. Furthermore, the only conversations over the telephone in connection with the inside plans of the concern had been between Bois and the resident Bentley, and the private wire from the head of the firm to the manager was switched by the key at the side of Eileen's desk. Eileen's own desk instrument had been arranged so that it was impossible for the secretary to "listen in" once the other connection was completed.

Vaguely disturbed, the girl hurried on back to the bond department, where the outside salesmen had their desks. Here she detected the man she wanted, and with an air of relief she went up to him.

"Hello, Eileen!" he exclaimed.

"Listen, Harry Sarver." She lowered her voice, leaning close. "I know there's been talk around the office about a leak in inside information. Tell me what you know."

Sarver smiled. "Everybody in the office seems to know that there is a leak, but no one seems to care to start talking about it."

"Who do they say gets the benefit of it; —what concern?"

"Why do you ask that?" he rejoined, not willing to commit himself.

"Why does it seem to be taken for granted that Pitkin & Patrick are behind the leak, or at least getting the benefit of the information."

"I suppose because of the trade in Midwestern Central Preferred."

"Couldn't they be acting for some one else, in good faith?"

"Of course." He glanced up, narrowly. "Why the sudden wish to whitewash Pitkin & Patrick?"

"You know very well," she retorted. Then she colored. "See here, Harry Sarver! You're not getting jealous, are you? You know there's no chance of anything between us, and you yourself wanted to be friends, and I've always come to you for advice since I left the phone company, and took up stenography and got this job through you—"

Sarver jumped to his feet, taking one of her hands. "Of course I want you to keep coming to me for friendly help, Eileen, and I'll always do anything I can for you. I—I'm not jealous. That—that is all over."

She brightened. "You keep me posted on anything that's said about the leak."

"Surely!"

He helped her to the floor from the desk, then released the hand he held. She failed to see the flash of a dark look of rebellious dissatisfaction which flitted over his face, but hurried away and back to her own private office where she hurriedly took up the phone.

The telephone number she gave was the number of Pitkin & Patrick.

"Mr. Gates, please!" Then: "Allen! This is Eileen. Yes, can you take me to lunch to-day? You have something desperately important to tell me?" She giggled. "Dear boy, I have something equally desperately important to tell you, and—"

Suddenly she stopped, for there over her stood Merle Bois, red anger flushing his face. She put her hand over the mouthpiece of the phone.

"What is it, Mr. Bois?"

"Whom are you talking to?" he barked.

"My—my fiancé!" She colored. Then she turned momentarily to the telephone. "Listen, Allen! Same time, and place. Good-by!" She knew he would understand the quick cut-off.

Old man Bois was still red. "What is his name?"

"Allen Gates."

"Where does he work?"

"He's a bond salesman for Pitkin & Patrick."

"And you are phoning Pitkin & Patrick?" The broker's hands clasped and unclasped in the inadequacy of his vocabulary for this moment. "You're phoning that unscrupulous firm of crooked corkscrews! You're using this telephone for personal calls when it is the rock-ribbed rule of this office that no employee use the phone for private calls—"

"The operator never said—" Eileen began, indignantly.

"The operator never stopped you because you are my secretary, but I want you to understand, Miss Norman, that you are amenable to rules also and—and I suggest that you find another fiancé or that that young man of yours find another concern to work for, or—"

Still sputtering old man Bois stalked on into his own private office.

Eileen, unhappy, managed to bear the morning through. But at the restaurant, even before there was a chance to exchange a word, a forlorn little hand found a larger one beneath the table and wide eyes of hers were raised to his with confidence that he would be able to reassure her fears. Breathlessly then she told what she knew of the leak.

"And Allen," she concluded, "with the rivalry between your firm and the people I work for, and now all this crooked work I'm—I'm afraid there may be trouble for us, that something may happen to spoil our love or break our engagement—" She began to tremble.

Allen Gates laughed, not at her fears, but in the joyous flush of the youthful confidence of the male, in his sense of ability to overcome all possible obstacles. Allen was only three years older than Eileen, but there was about him the clear cut freshness, the breadth and strength of the college athlete; and it was hard to acknowledge foreboding of any sort in his presence.

"Leaks are more or less common on the Street," he told her. "It won't take them long to find the guilty party and then there will be no more trouble."

"But Mr. Bois was terribly angry when he found me talking to you on the tele-

phone. You work for Pitkin & Patrick and we are engaged—"

Again he chuckled. "Some one else is very well aware of that fact, Eileen. That's what I wanted to tell you. Ever since yesterday afternoon, I've discovered, I have been followed by detectives. One of them questioned my landlady and she told me about it. I don't doubt but that they are in the employ of your boss."

"Then—then you knew about the leak when I phoned you?"

"Everybody over at Pitkin & Patrick's seems to understand that our concern somehow has been getting inside information."

"How? Who do you think is guilty?"

"No idea. The big chief keeps his counsel, and then there may be no leak at all. It may all be talk just to get the psychological goat of the folks over at your office. It's a mighty valuable thing if you can get your opponent on the Exchange upset or worried. It spoils his judgment and kills his hunches, and what's a trader in stocks if his hunches go back on him?"

"But there must be a real leak, Allen!"

"I think," Allen replied, "that for the present, at least so long as I am being shadowed, that we had better not see each other."

"But—" She went rather pale at that.

"It will only be for a few days."

"But—" Again a little hand sought his under the table.

"It's for the protection of your job, Eileen. You are very happy where you are and—and you know it will be at least a year before I will be in shape to make that little home for you."

"Can't—can't we have lunch together, say every other day, Allen?"

He looked about; then indicated a plainly dressed man at a table some twenty to thirty feet away. "There's my shadow now." He smiled.

"I—I thought it was possible to lose a shadow if you knew he was on your trail."

"I guess I could lose him all right, but isn't it better to let him trail me around and see for himself that I'm not concerned in the leak?"

"I want to see you, though," she reiterated.

"I'll phone you every day."

She shook her head. "You can't do that, and I cannot phone you any more. Mr. Bois caught me talking to you this morning, and there's no phone at the house."

Frowning, Allen Gates slouched back in his chair. Then suddenly an inspiration came to him and he straightened. He took out paper and pencil and lowered his voice.

"Darn it, Eileen," he said, "leak or no leak our times are not going to be spoiled. I won't try to take you to lunch every day, but when the coast is clear up at Pitkin & Patrick's I'll leave early for noon, and after losing the shadow will telephone you from the restaurant—a different one each time—and you can come and meet me as soon after that as you can get away. I'll simply wait for you. That—that will be better than for me to be seen with you evenings just now."

"But you can't telephone me at the office," she protested.

He smiled and waved the pencil. "That's the stunt I just thought of. You answer the phone for Mr. Bois, and so I'll ask for him instead of you."

"The operator there will listen in, probably."

"But when I say it is Mr. Fence—or some other name that suggests 'Gates'—and besides you will know my voice."

"But how can we talk if she listens in?"

"That's the scheme. Here—" He began writing. "We'll use a simple code. I'll give you a message for Mr. Bois, as if I was sending him certain information on the market. That is, I will have to tell you where the restaurant is. Preferred stock will mean Broadway, common stock Church Street, bonds Fulton Street—see?" He turned the paper for her to look. "The quotation on the stock or bonds will be the street number, disregarding decimal points, and always I'll find something in the current quotations to use—"

"How will you tell me that you love me?" she whispered.

He felt joyous over the code they were

working out in this impromptu fashion. " If I say an issue will decline that means I miss you terribly, and if I pretend I want you to tell Mr. Bois that a stock is going up right away and that now is the time to buy, why that means I love you worlds and worlds—"

With heads together they worked out the code in detail. Then because it was so very simple after all they tore up the paper in fine bits and dropped the bits into water in a saucer. The detective at the other table was forgotten, and he was too far away to catch any shred or detail of their conversation. So the lunch was highly successful.

Back at the office Eileen discovered that Merle Bois had not yet returned, and she wandered back to the bond department where she found that Sarver was again at his desk.

" What do you think, Harry?" she asked. " Detectives have been following Allen."

Sarver shook his head. He reached for her hand but she drew it away this time, failing to note the momentary narrowing of his eyes as she did so.

" I think it might be inadvisable for you to see Allen until the talk of the leak blows over," he said.

Suddenly she looked at him. And for once her scrutiny was close. " Harry, you are jealous. You—you're different. I—I don't feel that I should be giving you my confidence—"

" Eileen," he interrupted, " you have me all wrong. I'm—I'm tremendously worried over some of my own personal investments, and—and I don't want to lose my position as your faithful mentor."

She left him without replying. At her own desk once more she got to thinking about the leak, and to wondering how it might have occurred.

Finally she went on into the office of her chief. This was in the very corner of the building. She looked out of the windows on the two street sides, and opened one of them to glance out. There was a sheer drop to the street and no ledge, and besides, how could any one in broad daylight succeed in eavesdropping from outside?

The partitions were too high and heavy for any one to hear information of value through them. On one side was her own room, on the other the hallway and the telephone operator, eliminating any chance for an eavesdropper in the building itself. The floor, the ceiling—

Suddenly she was aware that old man Bois had entered behind her.

" Do you suppose," she suggested timidly, " that there could be a dictograph hidden in here anywhere?"

He glared at her. " My dear young lady," he remarked, " we have had the best detectives in the city on the job for several days. This office was very carefully examined three days ago by an expert, and is gone over again every night. You"—he softened a bit—" you are a very good stenographer and secretary. Now don't worry that pretty head of yours about matters beyond your grasp. Be careful about talking to people, that's all." A pause. " You may go, Miss Norman."

Eileen could not forget the leak however.

And in the course of the afternoon she noticed again a phenomenon that had intruded into her consciousness for a week or more, but to which she had previously given no attention.

Eileen's first business position had been with the New York Telephone Company as an operator on the " B " board. With the telephone receiver strapped to her head for stretches of two hours each, four times a day, constantly taking the number to be called on her own exchange from operators in exchanges all over the metropolitan area, she had developed a certain acuteness of hearing.

Hers was not the task of contact with the subscriber. She had had no control over the circuit brought to her ear. Rather any operator in any distant exchange by the mere pressing of a button could repeat the number to be called to Eileen. In time she not only recognized the click that meant some other girl was listening to see if the circuit was clear, but she became able in many cases by the sheer intangible quality of soundlessness of the wire to tell in advance what operator was about to give her a number to ring.

It was a phenomenon due to the slight

difference in ohms resistance of the various circuits, a difference scientifically reduced to the merest fraction, but yet existent. It was a faculty partly physical, partly intuitive.

And for a week or more Eileen had felt an intangible difference in the telephone extension to Merle Bois, through her desk, with the special connection into the office of Bentley, the general manager. She sensed the difference again with redoubled force in the course of the afternoon, and there came to her an amazing possibility.

Was the telephone wire tapped? Into her mind came the phrase, "Phantom circuit."

Before she had taken up stenography, and before she had met Allen Gates, she had struck up a friendship with the assistant wire chief at the exchange where she worked. He had told her of many adventures in the course of the discovery of various criminal misapplications of telephone service. She had heard that he had been promoted to wire chief, but she had not seen or heard from him directly for a considerable time.

Nevertheless, on impulse, she phoned the exchange, and to her delight found and identified herself to him.

"There's information leaking out here," she explained, "and I'm sure there's something different about the extension to the office of Mr. Bois. I—I'm wondering if there could be a phantom circuit?"

"I'll fix it with the wire chief over there," he said, "and come over myself."

He arrived accompanied by a man from the proper exchange.

"There can't be a phantom circuit," he explained. "That's where two different circuits are used, one wire from each to make a third circuit. There's only one pair of wires into your chief's office, however—" A pause, while he compared notes with the other man, and while they again consulted their lamps and resistance coils, temporarily connected in at the switchboard for testing purposes. "However," he went on, "there's something wrong about that extension, and I believe it's tapped—very cleverly."

The telephone wires throughout the office were carried along on the top of the mahogany partitions. Obtaining a ladder from the janitor, the telephone men followed the wire leading to Eileen's desk, and from there to the desk of Bentley, and from Eileen's desk to Merle Bois. The inspection was inch by inch.

And the wires were not tapped!

"Your circuit is a phantom, after all, I guess, Miss Norman," smiled the wire chief.

"You mean it—it's what you explained before?" she asked.

"I mean there isn't any!"

She showed her disappointment. "You said there was something wrong with the extension!"

"The resistance is very slightly low."

"Then—"

At that moment Merle Bois came out of his office, to join the group. Eileen explained. He flushed, turning to the men.

"You say there is nothing the matter?"

"I can find no signs of wire tapping," replied the wire chief.

"But the low resistance?" persisted the girl.

"That might be due to the old wires, or the condenser in the desk set—"

"You can change them?" she asked. "Run new wires?"

But Merle Bois took her arm. "They said there was nothing the matter with the extension, Miss Norman," he barked. "Now come in here."

In the office he faced her with red features.

"Didn't I tell you an hour or so ago not to concern yourself with the leak and with affairs beyond your comprehension? And yet you bring in telephone men to interrupt me in the middle of an important conference on the busiest afternoon in the week—" He turned away in disgust.

And a rather miserable girl found her way back to her desk. With odd stubbornness she was still sure that there was something wrong with the telephone and that it was through the extension to Mr. Bois that the leak occurred.

In the next three or four days, however, it seemed as if no more information leaked out. Twice Allen Gates telephoned and the code worked successfully. To Eileen

it was like a game, and recompensed her for the three evenings a week she had sacrificed.

Then Bentley, Bois & Bentley arranged to handle the new issues of preferred stock in a huge merger of railroad holdings—full details of which were not even given to Eileen. And upon the day that Bentley, for the firm, went upon the Exchange to endeavor to pick up in open market the few necessary shares of common stock to give the merging interests control of several minor subsidiaries, young Pitkin, for Pitkin & Patrick, was upon the floor to circumvent the manipulations of the rival concern with easy success.

Again the leak had proven itself at a vital moment.

Merle Bois called Eileen into his office.

"Miss Norman," he said, "so far as we can determine, so far as my detectives can eliminate possibilities, you are the only person through whom this information could leak out. You knew enough about the merger—"

"But, Mr. Bois," she protested. "You can't think that I—"

"If I'm any judge of human nature you're innocent," he admitted. "Yet you continue to meet your fiancé in business hours. He eluded the detective following him yesterday, but the man shadowing you reported—"

Her eyes went wide. "You mean that I am being followed, too?"

In an agony of apprehension she wondered if Allen would phone to take her to lunch this day. And if he did so should she accept, or how could she refuse in the code? There was no code arrangement for a refusal.

When Allen actually did telephone she responded as usual, lacking the courage to refuse to meet him, jotting down the street number of the café. And thereby Eileen put the issue into the hands of chance.

Leaving the building she stumbled across Harry Sarver, and to her surprise saw that he was coming out of the office of a new brokerage concern on the ground floor, a concern that she knew from conversations of Merle Bois to be of shady character and of the fly-by-night sort.

"Harry," she exclaimed. "What on earth were you doing in there?"

He gulped at seeing her. He tried to dissemble, but it was impossible to erase new lines of worry and distress from his face. At last he seemed to decide to take her into his confidence.

"Let me walk along with you a bit and talk," he pleaded, miserably. And then he confessed. "I've been plunging, Eileen," he said. "I was sure I had an easy killing and I played it hard, and it was a bum hunch. Then I saw a chance for another easy killing and I raised every nickel I could beg, borrow, or steal—even hocked my soul, I guess—and put it all on the one plunge. The market this morning has cleaned me out and—and I don't know what to do." He tried to force a smile. His eyes sought hers.

Instantly Eileen was all sympathy. "Come and take lunch with Allen and me," she urged, slipping a hand in his arm. "We'll cheer you up."

"Where are you going?"

She held up the slip. "This number on Fulton Street."

He accepted, willing to lunch with his rival, anything at all, so abject was his distress.

Then at Fulton Street the number turned out to be a haberdashery, and after a moment's puzzled frown Eileen laughed and turned to him again.

"I'm stupid to-day," she said. "It's this number on Church Street."

To Allen, who was waiting, she hastened to explain the delay by her mistake. "I knew you said common stock, Allen, but somehow I thought bonds and went to Fulton Street."

Allen laughed. Proud of his code, and seeing the uncomprehending expression on the face of Sarver, he hastened to explain to their guest. "Eileen isn't allowed to have personal telephone calls, so we worked up a code, and when I telephone her I pretend I am a business associate of old Bois, giving him market tips. To-day—"

Sarver, wetting his lips, interrupted eagerly. "Did you phone yesterday and say something about Consolidated Gas Preferred?"

"Yes, we had a fine meal over on Broadway and a great old chat."

"And—and two days ago"—there were beads of perspiration on the brow of the older man—"did you tell Eileen that Interstate Platinum was going to pass a dividend and that the issues would decline, drop into the cellar, or something like that?"

"That meant I missed her, oh, so much that I never could have expressed it without a code," Allen burst out with glee.

With quick dawning comprehension Eileen rose. "Excuse me just a moment, you two," she exclaimed. "I forgot something, and I must phone the office and—and I'll be right back."

In the telephone booth she telephoned her friend, the wire chief, first; then in the absence of Merle Bois she talked with Bentley, the general manager of the firm that employed her. To both men she gave excited and definite instructions.

Back at the lunch table she was noticeably ill at ease and did not relax until a policeman, accompanied by two detectives, marched into the restaurant about forty minutes later. The policeman put a hand on Sarver's shoulder.

"Harry Sarver, you are under arrest."

"Arrest!" Sarver started to struggle, but only for a moment.

"For wire tapping," added the bluecoat. "Anything you say will be used against you," was a second afterthought.

Allen Gates accompanied Eileen back to the office. On the first floor they were met by Bois and Bentley and more detectives. In the rear of the new brokerage office was a small room where a receiver, equipped with an amplifier, allowed any one in the little chamber to hear every word spoken on the private telephone extension of Merle Bois, whether by Bois himself, or Bentley on the special line to the general manager, or by Eileen on the outside line.

"It's the cleverest job of tapping I ever saw," explained the wire chief. "The new wires were brought up through the hollow post of the mahogany partition and spliced in and taped so that no one following the regular wires along the top of the partition would ever notice the tap, or even think of finding it in such an open place. Then they were carried through the floor and the room below was rented for a month just to give the men a chance to replaster the ceiling and paint it and let it get normally dirty again. The wires running to the basement through an abandoned 'pair' were carried up into this little room."

He picked up a flat object, about the size of a child's book, and faced Eileen.

"They were clever enough to leave out the transmitter in the listening set, so that no sound would carry back to the circuit, and they were clever enough to put a condenser in series so that the signal lamp on the board would work properly and so that the ringing current wouldn't burn out their receiver, but they were not quite clever enough to get exactly the proper resistance in their condenser, and so your ear caught the difference."

After the others had left Merle Bois faced the girl. "Tell me, Miss Norman, how you happened to suspect Mr. Sarver, and how you were able to direct the detectives to this place."

She smiled. "I met him coming out of this new brokerage place and that led me to put two and two together when I saw he had been listening in."

"How did you know he was listening in?"

She laughed, but with regret at the thought of the man who often had been her champion and friend. "Allen—Mr. Gates—and I had a code so we could talk over the wires in business hours. He pretended that he was giving me market tips to give you, but everything he said meant something else."

"But how did that reveal the fact that Sarver was listening in?"

"He thought they were real tips, and kept them to himself, and played them in the market with his own money. It ruined him and he betrayed himself to me at lunch as a consequence."

Merle Bois studied her for a moment. "Do you suppose if I gave your Allen Mr. Sarver's job with my concern that you two would be willing to stop talking codes over my telephone?"

She forgot for the moment that he was her boss. "Silly!" she said, which of course was delighted acceptance.

His Third Master

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Garden of Eden," "Gun Gentlemen," "The Untamed," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

THERE followed a deep hush; far away in the house there was the small, piercing whisper of a violin.

"Damnation!" said James Vincent.

"On the whole," said Dickon, stepping from behind the evergreen, "I heartily agree with you."

"Greene!" exclaimed James Vincent. "You followed me here, sir?"

"Not at all. I was sitting here enjoying the night when you and North approached. The conversation seemed quite harmless; it concerned no one but the morning coat and myself. And I could hardly avoid listening."

"I presume you were diverted?"

"Immensely."

He was wholly astonished by the rage which kept Vincent's voice trembling.

He added: "But I gather that you learned less than you had reason to hope."

"Learned less of what, Mr. Greene?"

And Vincent, as he spoke, was turning away. Dickon chuckled, and the laugh brought the older man squarely before him.

"What the devil do you mean by your innuendo, sir?"

It shocked Dickon; he knew perfectly well that of all the people in that house the enmity of James Vincent was more to be feared than the united power of the rest. He could crucify a man with an epigram and blot a woman's life with a smile. He had done it before; he would have done it more often had it not been for his singular reserve and withdrawal from society. But somewhere in Dickon that aggressive phrase struck metal and drew a spark. His own voice was as cold as the touch of iron to the hand when he answered: "You seemed eager to learn about Dickon

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 3.

Greene, sir. I wish to know why you did not ask your questions to my face?"

"My young friend," said Vincent in a tone that matched Dickon's as well as two bells chiming in unison, "I am less eager concerning the topic of Mr. Greene than any other topic I can readily name. Good night, sir."

"Good night," said Dickon Greene, "and better luck."

"Eh?"

Vincent turned again.

"I said: 'Better luck.' That's clear, I think."

"I find it obscure."

"I'm sorry."

"Unpleasantly obscure, sir."

"Then you are more obtuse than usual, Mr. Vincent."

He heard the hard breathing of Vincent in the darkness.

"If I were you," he said calmly, mastering his anger with a sudden effort and feeling that that mastery gave him immediate superiority in the struggle of wits, "if I were you I'd stay here until we'd come to an understanding."

"I see not the slightest necessity of any understanding between us."

"Mr. Vincent, you are in a temper."

"And therefore?"

"And therefore I overlook a tone which cannot be natural to you."

Even by that dim light he made out the struggle which disturbed the face of the other.

"Unfortunately I am of such a nature that I am upset, sir, by—eavesdropping!"

"Ah," said Dickon quietly, "there was once a time when such things were not spoken between gentlemen—even if there were a difference of years between them."

"God!" breathed the older man, and struck his hands together.

It was no more than a whisper; the impact was not more than a tap; and yet Dickon felt that the ground was shaken beneath his feet. Such a passion behind the cold eyes of the cynic he had never guessed.

"Again," said Vincent, "good night!"

"One moment, sir!" And Dickon made a step forward. "We must talk further."

"Impossible!"

"In that case I must literally detain you."

"Is it possible?" murmured Vincent, his voice broken with his rage. "Is it possible?"

"Mr. Vincent, I wish to recall you to a word which you spoke a moment since. It is impossible that that word should remain."

They stood face to face in the dark, but Dickon knew that the struggle was not between them, but of Vincent with himself.

"I feel that you are right," he said in a strangled voice, bringing the words out jerkily, one by one. "And I wish to retract that word."

"It is more than sufficient," said Dickon. "For my part, I regret that this friction has occurred."

"I think we have no further need of conversation, sir?"

"Mr. Vincent, doesn't it seem to your saner self that you have been acting like a child?"

"I, sir?"

"I mean no insult. But you have followed exactly the course of a child which is not used to opposition."

"I fail to follow you."

"Come, come! Am I to withdraw at once from the lists because you've taken it into your head to smile on a girl?"

He distinctly heard the other take two deep breaths.

Then: "I am myself again, Greene. This is a shameful affair."

"There is, however, a redeeming feature."

"And that?"

"It has occurred between gentlemen."

"I see," nodded Vincent. "Yes, that's to be taken into consideration." Suddenly he laughed. "Odd that my talk with you and with North should have come to the same conclusion, eh?"

"I hope this isn't a conclusion."

"You're a singular fellow, Greene. At your age if this had happened to me—well, we don't have to think of that. Let's go back frankly to the thing you last said. The girl."

"By all means."

"I have always felt, Greene, that men have a singular code where women are con-

cerned; I see no reason why two sensible men cannot get together and talk like rational creatures when their interests clash."

"If I had suggested the words to you," said Dickon, "you could not say anything in which I agree more heartily."

Yet he was deeply uneasy. During the passion of Vincent he had had a distinct advantage; but now that the man's reason had returned to him it might be another story.

"We have said so much," said Vincent, "that we might as well admit the rest. We are both profoundly interested in Cynthia Rainey. I am right?"

"You clear my mind of a last doubt, Mr. Vincent. It was your attitude that remained obscure to me."

"Apparently I've drawn this trouble on my own head. There are others in the field already and there will be more. But frankly we may be egotistical enough to say that we do not fear the rest of the competition. May we not?"

"That's my feeling. But in what way have you drawn the trouble on your own head?"

"By directing your attention to Cynthia Rainey in the first place at Silverman's."

"I beg your pardon. I must confess a small trick there."

"How's that?"

"You did not mention her at Silverman's."

"My dear fellow, do you mean to say—"

"Exactly. I put the words into your mouth when I met you at the Clermont that night."

"The devil!" gasped Vincent. And then he laughed heartily. "Greene," he said, his laughter breaking off sharply, "I must repeat what I've told you before. You're too clever to be safe."

"I suppose I should thank you for that."

"Not altogether."

"To return to your chat with North, I'll tell you in a few words what you want to know. You understand that Cynthia is eager for social prestige and that she wishes to make a so-called good marriage. And you want to know what there is in me and my position that interests her."

"H-m!" said Vincent.

"In short, this is the case: I have no money; I have no ancient family behind me; I have no strong connections; I have no interesting and striking past. In fact, I have spent most of my life since I left college in a bank as a teller. That, I think, sums up pretty accurately what you want to know."

James Vincent came a bit closer as if he prayed for light by which to study the face of Dickon.

"May I be equally frank?"

"Please do."

"You aren't the sort who gives something for nothing?"

"Certainly not."

"What do you wish in return for this confession—if I can call it that?"

"A fighting chance, Mr. Vincent."

"H-m! Do you mind explaining?"

"I intend to. You have in your favor every advantage—great wealth, position, connections, everything for which Cynthia Rainey is eager, and opposed to that I have nothing. The handicap is entirely imposed on me."

"Wrong, Greene. You have something that outbalances the rest—youth!"

"I beg your pardon. With girls under twenty-five there is a general admiration for older men. I surely need not tell you that."

"H-m!" said Vincent again. "Go on."

"You start, I say, with every advantage. But you have one power which I think it would be unfair to employ."

"Name it, Greene. By the Lord, I like the way you go about this!"

"That power is your ability to close every desirable door in New York to me within forty-eight hours."

"I? Close the doors in your face?"

"Don't smile, sir. I understand and so do you. You are looked up to as a dictator; you are esteemed as the greatest wit in the country. With a single innuendo you can undo all the work I have done; with a single controlled smile you can make a hostess blush because I am present in her house. What I ask is that you refrain from the knife, sir. I ask for a fighting chance."

"Not admitting all that you say, this seems to me sound sportsmanship."

"I knew it would appeal to you. You have on your side every advantage. I have on mine one thing: a vast determination to win and the willingness to pit my wits against yours."

"Greene, I begin to be excited. You're playing cleanly and you can count upon me to do the same. And I'll tell you this: the way things stand now I think a very small advantage may turn the scale."

"I agree with you. That's why I dread to-morrow."

"How's that?"

"I have ridden a good deal and know the jumps fairly well, but I've never ridden to the hounds; and you are a master huntsman."

"You think that the heart of Cynthia," chuckled the elder man, "is in the tail of the fox to-morrow?"

"She is in the flush of her first social glory," said Dickon. "She is pleased with all things around her. The admiration of the men is going to her head like wine. At the table last night you noted? She was transformed! She was floating in thin air."

"And the result?"

"The result is that she's apt to be the prize of the first man who appears in a favorable light if he has already broken ground with her, so to speak. And if either you or I ride back with the prize to-morrow I'll be sadly surprised if it doesn't tell the whole story. That's why I dread to-morrow."

"Then let me suggest this, Greene. I do know the riding to hounds fairly well, and I know this country like a book. Suppose both of us count to-morrow off and stay away from the hunt?"

It jumped the heart into Dickon's throat. It meant the removal of one great handicap from his path; and the cold new Dickon Greene rejoiced. But then that spark which had been struck in the heart of the old Dickon became a flame again.

"Mr. Vincent," he said, "I can't accept that generous offer. We'll both ride to the hounds. I'll take the chance."

"I warn you beforehand, it's a grave one. I have my own hunter here, and he's never been headed except by Mrs. Littleton's Wrack."

"Then I'll go over and get Wrack from her."

"Sorry, Greene; Wrack is a devil in a horse's form. Hasn't been backed this season. Besides, he's probably green from underwork."

"But Wrack or no Wrack, Vincent, I'm riding to the hounds!"

They shook hands in the darkness and the silence, and Dickon was surprised by the iron grip of the elder man.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NO QUARTER.

IT was not only the first time Dickon had ever ridden to the hounds, but it was also the first time he had ever seen a hunting costume. And after the ministrations of William North were ended he looked with a touch of awe at the strange figure in the mirror, a red, single-breasted coat, cut snugly to the hips, and then flaring into long, loose tails; white buckskin trousers; shiny black boots and spurs; a stiffly starched stock of linen over which North had labored longer than over any other detail, with a pin thrust angling through the front, with a gold horseshoe for the head, and crowning all a jaunty little cap of black velvet, scalp-tight, and a long black visor which gave him a sort of jockeyish rakishness. Underneath that visor a strangely stern face, paler than usual. He idly slapped against his boots the hunting crop which North had placed in his hand. The valet was standing back, his face suffused with open triumph.

"I knew it would do," he said. "I knew it would! You can pad a skeleton into a dress coat and make him look like a bit of the real elegance; you can touch up the cut of a morning-coat and make a man of fifty look like a boy; you can make anyone muster in street clothes with good finishing touches—cuffs and collar and gloves and shoes—but when it comes to the pink, then it takes a man to look the hunter."

"Rather roundabout, North, but I gather that I'll do?"

"Sir, I'm satisfied!"

It was the first time Dickon had heard

that sentence from the old valet. North was at the window.

"A lovely morning for the hounds," he said. "The scent will stick in that dew as if it were glued there. They're already gathering below, sir. Have you a decent horse?"

"I sent to Mrs. Littleton and asked for Wrack, son of Vengeance, North."

The valet started as if a stitch in his side had caught him.

"Not the gray, sir?"

"I never saw the brute."

"My God!" breathed North.

"Look here," said Dickon, "if the animal is as bad as all that, I'll tell her that I've changed my mind."

"Too late, sir," said North. "Too late," he added, gesturing out the window.

"They've saddled him. It will show fear to make a change now."

"Vincent warned me about him, and Mrs. Littleton sent to make sure that I knew what I was asking. Is he as bad as all that?"

He went to the window and looked down. Beyond the stables, in a stretch of smooth, rich turf, the horses were out; already some of the riders were up, trying out the paces of their mounts and putting them over some low hurdles and easy hedges nearby. It was a beautiful sight of action and color, all the hunters, men and women, in the same gay costume which looked so well on Dickon.

North had laid a hand across his eyes and stepped back from the window.

"What is it?" asked Dickon. "Something about Wrack?"

"Mr. Lorriston," said North sadly.

"I see him; he seems perfectly well."

"His coat, sir!"

"Well?"

"I see the wrinkles across his back clear from here! What could Granger have been thinking about to send him out like this? Wrinkled!"

"H-m!" muttered Dickon. "Disgraceful! But about Wrack—"

He stopped short, for there was a whirl of men about a horse, and when the eddy of struggling figures cleared he saw four stalwart men leaning back on lead ropes to hold a tall gray stallion with a red ribbon in its tail. All heads were turned toward the giant horse which stood with its forefeet planted and the short ears flattened along its neck. In spite of its size, there was something of a tigerish grace and ferocity about that figure.

"You don't have to tell me," said Dickon gloomily. "That's Wrack! You might as well pack our things, North. I'm not going to come back with the plume of Reynard."

"Wrack!" repeated North, as if the name fascinated him. "That's the horse, sir, that threw Ronald Guest himself!"

"But why didn't Mrs. Littleton tell me about the brute?"

"She thought you knew of him and wanted to try your hand. Heavens, sir, everyone knows Wrack! And yet, he may run like a lamb to-day. He has his moods."

"Pray God! I'm going down, North. One last look at the map."

For William North had prepared, as one who knew every inch of that famous hunting country, a minute map, with the distances chalked out. It was a big affair, with every dangerous jump, whether fence or hedge or creek, marked out clearly upon it. Late the night before, when everyone else in the house slept, Dickon had sat up studying like a college student before examinations, and now he could close his eyes and call up every feature of the landscape with the measured distances between from Tranton Manor to Seveney Wood, that black, thick forest with underbrush so dense that horses were useless in it, and never a fox had been pressed beyond its edge.

"Now for last instructions," said Dickon.

"If Wrack will let you ride him," began North.

"*Let* me?" echoed Dickon grimly. "Ah, man, if I had a real saddle and a pair of long stirrups on him, I'd see about that 'let.' But with those damned pads a man is helpless. Well, go on. If Wrack will let me ride him, what then?"

"Keep back in the hunt. The others know these jumps. I've told you about them, but no amount of telling will ever teach a man what a jump is until he's taken it and seen the hedge whir by under him with a leap."

"That's granted. I'll let them lead me

over the jumps. But if they keep leading me what will happen at the kill? They'll lead me to that as well!"

"No fear, sir. When you see the end is coming, unless it's more sudden than usual in this country, let go of Wrack's head and he'll do the rest. He's a glutton for work. But the chances are there won't be more than five men in at the kill—five men and Mrs. Littleton; and one of the five will be James Vincent with his Wanderer. You see him, sir? Ah, there's a hunter!"

And Dickon saw Vincent ride into view beyond the stable roof on a light roan, rangy, with that straight back, particularly at the loins, which means good jumping.

A musical uproar came clamoring up and through the window; it made the blood jump in Dickon's veins.

"The hounds are out," said William North. "Now, sir, down to them and good-luck with you!"

At the door Dickon turned and dropped his hand on the shoulder of the valet.

"Mind you, North, this is the crisis. If I can't ride Wrack we're through; if I can't get first to the kill we're through as well. In fact"—he chuckled grimly—"I'm riding for a fox's tail and thirty millions! So get that packing done and if I lose we'll admit defeat and go on a new tack."

"Yes, sir. But I trust you, sir."

"Even against James Vincent on Wanderer?"

"I trust something, sir, to downright nerve, sir!"

It stuck in the brain of Dickon on the way down. "Downright nerve!" He had little else, indeed, to take into this ride than nerve of the most brazen order; half the crack hunters of the county would be out, for it was not an affair for Mrs. Littleton's guests alone, but was given by a hunt club nearby. Yet a sort of fatal premonition told Dickon that James Vincent would outride and outdare them all and take the prize unless he, Dickon Greene, raw hunter, broke in ahead and gathered the tail of Reynard.

Absorbed in his thoughts he did not see the curious looks which were cast upon him when he came out upon the turf behind the stables. The baying of the hounds was in the distance, fading and blowing freshly back as they were sent ahead toward the headquarters of the hunt club; there was a stamp of feet close beside him, the flash of the sun along a gleaming flank, and James Vincent on Wanderer was prancing at his side.

"Greene," he said, and he leaned from his horse so that his voice was sure not to carry beyond the ears for which it was intended, "don't ride the gray. He's bad enough at the best, and you can see for yourself that he's in a devilish humor."

Dickon looked across. The great stallion had jerked back on his ropes and now stood panting like a dog in leash, and apparently ready to spring at the throats of those who held him and tear them with his teeth or trample them with his black hoofs. They were by no means ignorant of his feelings. Dickon saw four studious faces watching the gray, their eyes wide with fear and alertness.

"It isn't a matter of backing down," went on Vincent. "No one would ride that man-killer today. Everyone will understand."

"Give me the word to send Wrack back to his stall," called Mrs. Littleton, riding up. "He's a perfect devil!"

Dickon wavered, and, as often happens when a person grows studious, he began to note details while he hesitated. He saw, for instance, Mrs. Littleton's bay stallion, the Deacon. He had heard much about that horse, stupid looking, but a wise old hunter. And then, vaguely, he noted Cynthia Rainey in the distance. There was a crowd of young fellows around her, reining their horses away from her and each eager to show his horsemanship. She herself sat the saddle admirably; her Western training showed in that and she had had enough lessons to grow familiar with the different grip that goes with an English pad-saddle; she handled perfectly her imported French hunter, a black mare as nervous as a hysterical woman, but with the stamina and speed of sturdy Arab stock underlying those too-delicate lines. Others about her were talking while they checked their horses, but Dickon saw that her eyes were fixed steadily upon him.

She, too, no doubt, was wondering

whether or not he would accept the great chance. She made a brilliant figure in her "pink" coat, with the sun catching her hair under the edge of her cap and setting it a-glitter; a delicate, shapely form, laughing with her companions. But under the laughter a flash of insight told Dickon that she was weighing seriously a grave matter. On his willingness to ride Wrack a great deal might hinge more than appeared on the surface.

"You can have my bay mare," Mrs. Littleton was saying. "She doesn't stand up quite so well as Wrack, but she's a darling to ride and she jumps like a witch. Do be sensible, Mr. Greene!"

"This is kind of you," said Dickon, and he made himself smile straight into the face of Mrs. Littleton, "but I can't make up my mind to give up Wrack. Please don't worry about me."

She made a gesture of surrender and reined her horse away. The Deacon went with amiable docility. James Vincent stooped from his saddle again; he had noted that glance from Dickon to Cynthia Rainey and his jaw was set hard.

"Very well," he said, "and from now on, no quarter!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JAMES VINCENT MANEUVERS.

"NO quarter," nodded Dickon gravely, and stepped close to his mount.

Unquestionably Wrack was not a picture horse. A pronounced Roman nose disfigured an otherwise perfect head and the withers were a bit high for ordinary saddle purposes, but ideal for a hunter. All the other salient features of fine blood were there. He looked what he was—a cross-bred horse who had reverted back to a slight strain of Arab blood. There was the long neck which means speed and that long forehead which is so desirable in saddle animals; there was a great girth of lungs at the cinch; and the belly sloped away to a greyhound gauntness. He was one of those horses which, seen in action, seem too slender and rangy; seen standing still he appeared too heavy across the shoulders and hips for speed. The hind legs were particularly fine, the thighs deep and broad but with an interval between them; the prominent stifles angled out; and above all Dickon looked at the hocks, big, bony, clean, wide from front to back.

"That horse can jump," he said to himself, but in his abstraction he had spoken alive.

"But most generally," said one of the grooms who held him, "he jumps the wrong way!" And there was a deep, ominous chuckle of agreement from the others. "All right, sir, we have him while you mount."

"If I can't mount alone," said Dickon, knowing that he had lost color and enraged by that knowledge, "I can't ride him alone. Stand clear of his head!"

As he spoke, he took the reins, and the grooms, surprised, but with alacrity, loosed their ropes and stood back. The moment he stepped in, Dickon realized the mass of the horse; he must have stood a good seventeen hands, or close to it, but his weight of shoulders and hips made him deceptive at the slightest distance; instead of men making him look tall, he made men look short, as all finely built horses will do. Freed from the ropes, the giant hunter began to sidestep, not with the sprawling motions of most horses when they traverse, but with a catfooted agility. Every muscle seemed a watchspring ready to uncoil. And Dickon felt suddenly as he used to feel in his childhood when he stood before the swaying bulk of an elephant at the circus.

"'Ware!" shrilled a dozen voices.

The big gray went back on his haunches and strove to whirl and strike. Dickon lunged back, bringing his whole weight suddenly against the reins, and Wrack brought his forefeet heavily to the ground. Before he could rear again Dickon, with a spring, was in the saddle. A generous rattle of handclapping broke out around him but he hardly heard it; under him he felt Wrack settling and gathering his huge strength for an outbreak and he got the feel of his reins strongly, ready to put all his strength against the bit. It was only a moment of hesitation, and then to his utter astonishment the gray relaxed and stood perfectly in hand. Dickon sighed with relief.

"Watch him!" called one of the grooms. "He's foolin' you, sir. He'll raise hell before you're back from the hunt. Watch them ears, sir!"

One of them was forward, one of them was back.

"Thank you for that," said Dickon, but without turning his head. "I'll remember it."

In his heart he yearned for the long stirrups of his Western days; these short ones gave him a ludicrously inadequate grip, and for any real bucking he knew that he would be helpless. In the meantime the group was under way—a round dozen or more from Mrs. Littleton's house-party, and most of these on their own hunters which they had sent down against this special occasion.

He got Wrack out at the very end of the procession; that red ribbon on his horse's tail meant that he was a kicker, and there was no use endangering the fragile ribs of some of the other blooded animals. He kept the gray back and in the meantime watched the crowd. Mrs. Littleton was toward the head. Sylvia Lock, riding beautifully, kept a frisky gelding in hand; Godwin Sanders, his slender shoulders looking fairly poured into his "pink," rode somewhat apart from the rest, sulkily. But the chief knot was around Cynthia Rainey. She was lovely as a painting by a master of color, and appreciation surrounded her like a mirror. To Dickon's surprise, James Vincent was not close to her, but there was an easy explanation of that. A knot of four had formed around her, and there was no room for another; it would need skillful generalship to break into that group. But Dickon waited with a confident smile; he trusted much to the dictator of fashions, and it was not long before the change came.

Wanderer, a nervous horse, showed a sudden outbreak of irritability in a position exactly ahead of Cynthia. There was a sudden sidling of many horses, a feminine outcry, and there was James Vincent beside Cynthia Rainey making his apology for crowding her. Apologies, it seemed, which required a long explanation and a talk thereafter. Cynthia was completely occupied for the remainder of the ride, and yet it was all done so naturally that not a single black look went the way of Vincent; only Dickon rode quietly smiling at the rear of the group. As for Cynthia, he was in no hurry to break in upon her. And also, he needed every moment of concentration to read the mind of the gray, if he could, and sense the paces of the big stallion. Even the walk of Wrack suggested speed and power, dangerous power. His long flexible stride kept up easily, at a walk, with the half-trot of the rest of the cavalcade, and when, rounding a hill, the baying of the hounds burst loudly about them, they saw the brilliant hunt on the farther slope, and Mrs. Littleton's party swung into a gallop to join the rest, Dickon had to put a strong wrap on Wrack to keep down his pace. It was like the loosing of swift water from behind a tall dam, that sudden rush of the stallion.

The fox was somewhere in Wind Valley within a radius of half a mile, it was reported; they could put the hounds on him; so there was little time wasted in introductions. The dew was thick; the sun low; the wind hushed; the air chill; never so fine a morning for the hounds. But there were some gloomy moments for Dickon as the hunt straightened away, the eager hounds in front and the master calling directions in a cheery voice that carried amazingly through the quiet morning. That gloom came from the turning of heads with which everyone had marked him and Wrack, and then the stir of voices and comment. Wrack was out again; someone hoped in a voice unfortunately high that it would not mean more than a broken leg for the rider. And now, as they dipped downhill into Wind Valley a chubby man who must have scaled close to two hundred pounds drew near to Dickon. He rode a roan which seemed on the verge of buckling under that great weight, a delicate limbed creature, tossing her head as though in a just complaint. Only a closer glance and a brief study of the play of her fetlocks told Dickon that she was a notable weight carrier.

"I haven't met you," said the red-faced stranger. "My name is Haines—Judge Haines."

"Glad to know you, judge." And Dickon stretched out his hand. "I'm Dickon Greene."

"Never mind shaking hands," said the judge. "Glad to know you, Mr. Greene; but there's no call for me to feed Dainty—bless her—to Wrack's heels."

"You know Wrack, then?" said Dickon gloomily. Everyone seemed to know the gray, in fact.

"Know him?" The judge grinned. "I should say I do! I raised him. I know him so well that I sold him!"

"H-m!" groaned Dickon.

"But," said the judge, "if you keep your feet loose in the stirrups you probably won't get a bad fall—if he throws you."

He added the last phrase as an afterthought—something to be taken for granted. It reminded Dickon of the old days and someone on the opposite football team daring him with a grin to try that place in the line. That was before he became known to the game. After he was known there were few so rash.

"I'm tolerably sure that I'll stay in the saddle," he said, "bar the chance that Wrack falls."

"Wrack never falls," said the other.

"Well, judge, we'll finish the hunt, then."

"H-m!" said the judge. "I've always said that the only thing Wrack needs is a master."

His eyes admitted considerable doubt as to whether or not Dickon were that master.

"Steady, girl!" he soothed the mare with dexterous hand. "All Wrack needs is a master. He runs now because he hates his riders; if he ever got a master he'd run for the love of his master and for the love of speed. I know him; that's why I gave him away," he reiterated maddeningly. The cheery round, red face became a shadowy ill-omen to Dickon. "Ah, they're close to friend fox, by Jove!"

The hounds had suddenly given voice altogether in a new note that told Dickon in spite of his ignorance that it was the voice of the hunter who senses the hunted. There were some seven or eight score of the hunters, and these now bunched suddenly, as if to await orders. The orders were not long delayed. There was a mellow blast of a horn, then a strong voice traveled down the wind: "Gone away!"

And at the view halloo there was an answering hail from every member of the hunt. Dickon himself shouted hoarse and deep, but remembering the last advice of William North, he put Wrack under a pull and settled back in the ruck of the hunt.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WRACK, SON OF VENGEANCE.

HE had no sight of Reynard and he had no wish for such a sight; he was contented to keep in the rear and follow the hunt as it rushed across the shrubs and through the low forests of Wind Valley. The going here was heavy with sand, most of the way, but even in the sand he felt the dizzy spring of the gray's gallop sweeping them along as easily as the wind. He had to keep so strong a pull to retain the stallion that it bowed Wrack's neck, but always through the pull on the reins Dickon was studying the mind of the horse, and watching those stubborn ears waver back and forth. He began to feel that there was something in what the rosy judge had said; Wrack needed only a master whose superiority and control he would not question. Then all that magnificent strength and speed would go at once into service as wholehearted as his viciousness was dangerous now. He needed that as a man without a country needs a flag, and without such a master he would be a useless danger to the end of his days.

But what a horse!

Up the far slope of Wind River toiled the hunt, and the voice of the hounds dropped across the ridge and became at once a sound miles distant. Yet where the other horses struggled in the deep going, and where some saved their mounts by pulling them to a trot, Wrack cantered as easily as if he had a paved road under his powerful feet.

It was an open meadow beyond and the hunt flashed in full view running across it, a sun-dazzling picture in red and black and white against the green background; far away in front the white and black and tan of the hounds; far away ahead of them something small and straight that wavered as it moved. The fox?

To relieve the ache in his shoulders he

loosed Wrack for an instant and a dozen leaps sent him rushing into the thick of the riders. James Vincent and Cynthia Rainey galloped not far away as he drew rein again and he saw them, going down the slope, take the narrow gulch of Old Rusty River side by side, a flash of roan, a flash of gleaming black, and a beautiful thing to see. The next moment there was a gathering and tensing under him and then he was launched at dizzy speed through the air. Wrack had jumped Old Rusty, and he had done it with an ease that left Dickon gasping; yet many a horse had refused the jump; he gave one catch glance over his shoulder and saw half a dozen spurring back for a second try at the gulch.

It was up-hill now, only a slight rise, but a significant one, for at the very crest of the hill stretched a hedge that looked ridiculously low; yet, one, two, three—the horses failed of the jump and twenty more refused it. It was the slope that killed their momentum. He saw Vincent's roan take the hedge with perfect grace; he saw Cynthia Rainey, riding beautifully, shoot up on her black and disappear. The calling of the hounds plunged back at him, and then—as he leaned forward for the jump, Wrack came to a sliding halt, on all four braced feet.

The impact of that sudden stopping drove Dickon lunging forward, and while he was off balance the fight began. It began with a swift rearing. A jump to either side would have unseated him; the rearing threw him back into place, and when Wrack came down again, stiff-legged, Dickon was sitting tight, seeing red with anger. The roan of Judge Haines cantered blithely up the slope and vaulted the hedge like a bubble tossing in a wind. So easily! And then Dickon saw no more; only the redness; only a consuming rage. It was a fine bit of bucking, but he felt it only in a vague knowledge that a series of tremendous jarring blows were being dealt to the back of his head; the danger of that bucking was lost in a consuming consciousness of two things; first that Wrack was uselessly expending priceless energy; secondly, that the voice of the hunt was dying away. Suddenly Wrack was stock-still; not conquered, Dickon knew, for his head was high, and of those short, sharp ears one was forward and one was back; not conquered, but ready to surrender the idea of throwing his rider and use some other more devilish means of dismounting him. He swung Wrack for the hedge; once more there was that halt on braced feet. A pair of stragglers from the gulch swept by; they shouted to him in applause, for they had seen an exhibition of riding they would talk about when they rejoined the hunt; others were riding horses which refused the jump around to one side and through the gate. Dickon was on the verge of imitating them when he remembered, like the ghost of a whisper, one of North's injunctions never to let a horse refuse a jump successfully, for if he refused one he would refuse another. So Dickon pulled Wrack about and spurred him cruelly back, far back, almost to the gulch. Then he headed him about and drove for the hedge. It had been purely a question of temper, not jumping ability, he saw then, for they sailed over the hedge with three feet of clearance below.

And now they were sweeping after the others and gaining with dizzy speed. He let out half his pull on Wrack, but the resultant burst of running was such that he increased his draw again, for fear of winding the eager stallion; but that brief flash of free galloping had brought Wrack's ears pricking forward. "Ah," thought Dickon to himself, "if I could get him to run like that for the love of me!"

And a second later they cleared Tom's Creek, a tributary of Old Rusty and larger than the river itself, and were with the hunt.

It was smaller now. Two or three dozen riders had had to pull up at the past three jumps; half of them were hopelessly out of it; another half were killing their mounts to get up with the rest and make up the handicap. Yet here was Wrack, for all his delay, up with the main body and running without a single deep breath! The hunt knew of his struggle with Wrack; he could tell it in their faces, and the judge, reining his roan nearer, called out: "One scalp for you, lad. Keep it up!" That from the judge, and from Cynthia Rainey a look of

bright curiosity and another gloomy look from James Vincent.

That thoughtful glance from James Vincent was in itself worth all the effort of the ride; then there was a whirl of confusion and a great shouting before him with the hunt fanning out swiftly to either side. It was a high fence of several rails, and before it the horsemen crumbled away and brushed to the sides like water against a dam. A few were beyond it, galloping after the hounds; three were down on the far side, and one a bad fall, for the rider lay on his back with his arms thrown out wide to the sides. It was the Waterloo of half the hunt that day; for not one horse in three could take the fence, and of those who went down to the gate far to the left there were few indeed who were able to make up the lost ground. And Dickon fell in behind James Vincent, leaving it to that fine hunter to pick a way through the confusion.

He did it with wonderful skill; he wove through the mass of halting horses and shouting riders, and a moment later his roan and Cynthia's French black flashed over the fence; Dickon came behind them like a thunderbolt, a jump that pulled his heart up behind his teeth, for Wrack seemed to have springs of untellable power in his hind legs.

Others were making toward them from the rear, but only twenty riders kept closely on the hounds, and it was plain that among these was the winner, somewhere, for horses which had failed before would fail utterly when they reached the Halliwell Hills. And there were the hills rolling up before them, tumbled and brownish-green and criss-crossed with hedges and fences enough to take the heart out of the best jumper that ever ran. For there were jumps going uphill and jumps going down into the rut of hollows, and in the little valleys were small streams which had to be vaulted if one were to keep up with the pack. Dickon saw the red-faced judge shaking his head and cursing loudly to himself as the hunt swept toward those hills.

There followed twenty nightmare minutes while they zigzagged through the hills. Somewhere in the distance Dickon heard the chiming of the hounds, and sometimes the voice of the master very loud and cheery; but he heard these things through a mist. All that was real to him was the form of James Vincent picking a cunning way among the obstacles and riding like a wizard with Cynthia Rainey beside him. She would have been out of it hopelessly long before had he not kept her with him, and yet she rode wonderfully well, and every time the mare rose for the jump there was a flash of sun on that yellow hair and a brief, happy shout from Cynthia as they shot over. Behind them Wrack did well; none of the jumps bothered him. Up-hill and down seemed all the same to his mulish surefootedness; but Dickon kept reading the mind of the stallion, for he knew that not far off was the moment for which the gray was biding his time to shake off this persistent rider.

Then a great green meadow shone pleasantly before them, and Dickon, looking around, saw that the hunt had narrowed to meager proportions indeed. There were Vincent and Cynthia; there was slender Godwin Sanders riding bolt erect as if he despised this sort of amusement; there were three men whom he did not know, the master, and coming streaking over the hill to one side came Mrs. Littleton. She was transfigured. For the first time he saw a stain of color in her cheeks, her eyes flashed; she was laughing, and for an instant Dickon looked through twenty years of life as clear as glass and saw her as she had been in her youth, a heart-stopping beauty.

"Oh, Dickon," she cried as she drew close to him, "nobly ridden! You have Wrack in hand!"

It was the first time she had used that first name, as though her admiration extorted it from her. Dickon smiled, but he shook his head.

Deeping Forest rose before them, tall old trees into which one could look for a furlong or more, for all the undergrowth had been cleared away. For the second time the fox doubled and now he was in the edge of the wood. Last of the nine riders of the hunt, Dickon entered the shadow with a strong pull on the reins. For he felt a quickening of the big body beneath him, a tensing of

mighty muscles much as that which preceded a jump. The time had come for the stallion's effort. What would it be? He took a strong pull, and brought Wrack back to a hand gallop.

Then it happened.

One thrust forward of that long neck tore the reins through Dickon's fingers and when he wrenched at the curb it tore the mouth of Wrack open, but the bit was already between his teeth. In two jumps he was rushing at full speed, and Dickon saw, with horror, that he was headed down a long avenue where the branches swung low, grazing the back of the stallion. He glanced aside; there was a chance of escape if he flung himself out of the saddle to be bruised on the ground, but better that than to be brained by a low-swinging branch. He loosened his feet in the stirrups and prepared for the jump; he was leaning forward to swing himself clear, indeed, when the cry of the pack, deadened by the forest, was caught by some hillside in the clearance beyond and flung back at him as if by a sounding board. Hot blood was suddenly pounding in Dickon's temples and in the tips of his fingers there was an aching pulse.

"Damn you!" he cried. "I'll be in on the death!"

He forgot Cynthia Rainey; he forgot James Vincent; he remembered only the waving plume of the fox, lowered now to a desperate speed, no doubt. He wound his left hand into the mane of the horse and flattened his body along the length of Wrack. Then they struck the deadly alley; there was a ripping about his head and shoulders, whipping of supple branches, and then a stunning blow across the head knocked him out of the saddle. It was the very violence of the blow that saved him from being brained a moment later against a heavier branch, for the impact shot him far to one side, and there he clung to Wrack with both hands and with one spurred heel in the pad.

Suddenly he found the bright sunlight about him; they were through Deeping Forest, and now he was dragging himself back into the saddle with the meager hunt swarming down the valley ahead of him, the scattered riders and the hounds ahead, a mass of waving feather. His cap was gone; he felt the wind whistle in his flying hair as he went down the slope after them.

"We thought we'd lost you," some one called.

Then there was a flash of fright in Cynthia's face, and: "Only hunting madness," some one answered her question.

Then the hounds were close to the pounding feet of Wrack; he stood up in the stirrups, wrenched back with all his power, and by an effort that twisted the stallion's head down to his chest pulled him back to an easier pace. Something was fluttering at his shoulder; it was the red coat, slashed to ribbons by the whipping branches. How wild a picture he made he could vaguely judge by the faces of those who rode nearest.

"I saw him head down the alley," panted Mrs. Littleton. "Oh, Dickon Greene, you've lost your senses to ride him that way!"

No more talk then; three sturdy obstacles rose before their course, a fence, a hedge, both of which all nine cleared; and then they came to Fisher's Leap, where a man had been killed a dozen years before. For it was a hedge with a broad stretch of water beyond and a gravelly shore to bound it. Fox and hounds went through, and Godwin Sanders, first of the hunt, took the hedge cleanly. He took it cleanly, but when Dickon, riding next, put Wrack to it, he saw, from the height of his jump, Sanders standing stupefied beside the fallen body of a horse that struggled vainly to rise—vainly, for one foreleg was oddly twisted and angled out below the knee. The next instant Wrack landed; there was a grinding sound as his forehoof struck a stone and rolled it, then horse and rider pitched to the side.

Something struck Dickon on the forehead and a mountain of darkness was dumped upon his brain.

It seemed an eternity of cool oblivion through which he lay; in reality it could only have been the fraction of a second, for when he opened his eyes James Vincent and Cynthia Rainey were drawing rein beside him.

Dickon started to his feet.

"Go on!" he called. "I'm not hurt!"

"Your head—" cried Vincent, pointing.

"Go on!" shouted Dickon. "I need no help!"

"He's out of his senses," said the voice of Cynthia. "Help him, James."

"It's only a scratch," said Vincent coldly. "Let him alone."

He turned his horse's head; and Dickon saw Cynthia waver for a moment and then turn and spur after Vincent. He felt that she was riding out of his life. Or was it only the hunting madness with her, too, that fever to be in on the death?

The hounds and the hunt had dropped behind a hill and the voices were dim with distance when Dickon felt something warm and moist against his cheek. It was the muzzle of Wrack, who stood there panting, but both ears pricked straight forward and his head was turned toward the disappearing hunt, as though he wondered at this delay. Whether Dickon won or lost that day, Wrack had found a master.

"Steady!" called Dickon as he grasped the pommel.

For it seemed to him that the stallion reeled to and fro.

He raised his foot, but missed the stirrup. Then he found that Wrack was standing like a rock with his great head turned, watching the master in surprise. It was his brain that reeled and staggered. He put up his hand and it came down hot and red from his forehead. A hilltop near by with the trees upon it was doing a crazy dance.

All sound of the hunt had died away when he got his foot in the stirrup again and slowly, slowly dragged himself into the saddle. He was still feeling for the stirrup with his right toe when Wrack lunged into a gallop and the impact of that sudden start sent Dickon lurching far back.

"Steady!" he called.

The stallion cut down his pace to a soft trot, and Dickon, sitting up, found that his hands were buried in the mane of Wrack and by the power of voice alone he had controlled the big gray. The reins dangled free.

It was that intoxicating sense of mastery that cleared his head so that he could sweep up the reins again and cry shrilly to Wrack: "Now, boy!" And they were off!

A hot pain was eating into his forehead and the warm trickle increased down his face, but when they topped the hill and the wind cut against him he forgot both pain and blood, for on the wind came the cry of the hunt.

Never before, perhaps, had the rein been loose on the neck of Wrack; never before, certainly, had he run as he ran now. He whirled like a sprinter on a track down the slope and up the rise beyond, climbing swiftly high and higher until they saw before them, far away, the black mist which was Seveney Wood. Below them the ground dropped sharply away, and one, two miles off they saw the hunt streaking. With a groan Dickon drew rein. It was no use to ride for that kill, he thought. Then, with the words forming in his brain, the hunt whirled about like the loose lash of a snapping whip and sped almost straight back along their former course. Reynard was run almost to the ground, or he would never have doubled so soon, with Seveney Wood so close before him.

But back they came, flashes of red and white far below, and at the turn the cry of the hounds came sweetly to Dickon on the hill. There was still a ghost of a chance that he could cut across the country and make up the lost ground. He swung Wrack about and galloped over the hills, angling to break in on the straight course of the hunt.

He reached the brow of the plateau at the same time that the hunt streaked across just below him; but beneath him the hillside dipped away in a gravelly fall that was almost a cliff, a dizzy plunge into the ravine through which the hunt ran. They caught sight of him, looking like a giant on the edge of the height, and as they passed he saw Cynthia wave her hand, and after her, James Vincent.

All reason left Dickon at that sight. Were they laughing at him? He put the spurs to Wrack and cleared the edge of the cliff at a leap. By all the laws of chance that flying start should have made the stallion lose footing and sent them both tumbling in a shapeless red heap to the bottom of the gorge, but Wrack caught his balance like a cat—in mid-air, and landed on all fours.

He braced himself far back on his haunches, and down they went, sliding, with the shout of horror tingling in Dickon's ear from below. After them, as they struck the level floor beneath, reined a shower of gravel and rocks, but a moment later Dickon straightened out after the hunt, with Wrack flying rather than running.

It was too late; he passed Mrs. Littleton, whipping her flagging mount; he passed the master with a red, angry face; but when he came up, the mass of raging dogs was tearing the body of the fox, and James Vincent stood beside his horse laughing up to Cynthia Rainey, with the tail of Reynard in his hand. The picture sank slowly into Dickon's brain. He had lost.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BEAST.

WRACK himself seemed to realize failure; he stood with hanging head, his long sides heaving from the strain of his great run. Yet, despite the leaden weight which oppressed him, Dickon could not but feel that the picture was complete and perfect. James Vincent was as dapper, as composed, as when he started the ride. There was a slight flush in his cheeks that made him seem younger by a score of years, and the white, uncovered head, as he smiled up at Cynthia was a startling but not unpleasant contrast. It was not hard for Dickon to press close—he had to lift Wrack forward with the spurs—and stretch out his hand.

"It was a hunt worth winning," he said heartily, "and I don't grudge you the prize."

He had put just a hint of meaning in his voice in speaking, but the eyes of the arbiter were clear, direct as he answered: "I had a bit of luck and the tail of Reynard, but the honors go to you." He added that little, unnecessary pressure of the hand which means everything and said: "I heard them shouting to you to stop and I glanced back just as you went over the brink of the hill on Wrack. Gad! It brought my heart into my throat. It was a splendid thing to do, Dickon!"

Dickon looked back at the bluff; it was incredibly high; it chilled him to look at it. Had he done that thing to win the tail of a fox? Had he even done it to win the heart of Cynthia Rainey?

Her horse was a staggering wreck and there was a sound in her breathing that seemed to promise to Dickon's wise ear that the French mare would never run another hunt, yet Cynthia sat the saddle erect, brilliant, drinking in the admiration of the gathering crowd. She was the only woman to be in on the death; she had outridden even Mrs. Littleton, and though, to be sure, only the cunning coaching of James Vincent had brought her through so finely, the main point was not the assistance she had received, but the triumph she had scored. Crystal white, or stained with brilliant color, people smiled in instant appreciation when they glanced at her face; for she seemed the apotheosis of delicate, tender, generous femininity. Only Dickon could remember how she had ridden by him with only a word when he had staggered to his feet after the fall, with blood streaming down his face. She had left him with hardly a glance and ridden on to get in on the kill. Under that soft, girlish exterior there was a certain hard purposefulness which indeed she had already partly confessed to Dickon, and now he saw it for himself. Oddly enough, it did not anger or disgust him. For the first time he felt a serious interest in her, perceiving a touch of her mother's stamina in Cynthia; but regarding her for the first time seriously, he also looked deeply into her nature for the first time. What he saw gave him pause. She had far more than beauty; she had something more that assured him that whatever she gained she would never lose.

In the meantime the scattered hunt was streaking toward them over the hills and up the meadow like a great flight of birds, tossed into confusion by a violent wind. The whole landscape was dotted with moving points aimed at one focus—the kill; for, beside the hunters themselves, there had been many other horsemen and automobile parties who posted themselves at points of vantage to watch the ride and now swept out of concealment to see at close hand

the riders they had watched with glasses from a distance. A dozen or more big machines were trundling cautiously across the meadow, winding to avoid soft ground and bump, and honking their horns to join the jubilation. Where there had been half a dozen people a few minutes before, there was now the nucleus of a rapidly growing crowd. Oddly enough, Dickon found himself the center of the group. He found hands clapped on his shoulders; voices shouted or shrilled at his ears.

"The finest thing I ever saw, by God!" cried the master, and Mrs. Littleton was smiling at him speechlessly.

Cynthia Rainey had drawn a little apart from the rest; perhaps, thought Dickon, because it gave every one a chance to see her, although her withdrawal might appear an act of modesty. But heads were turning and they were pointing her out. The only woman to be in on the kill! But now she left her point of vantage and wound her down-headed horse through the crowd straight toward Dickon. He had dismounted from Wrack to look over the big gray, and some one—yes, it was the old, red-faced breeder of the stallion—had insisted on tying his own big silk handkerchief around the still bleeding head of Dickon.

"And I'd give more than that of mine to the man who has mastered Wrack," he was saying. "Look at the big devil now!"

For Wrack, distracted by the crowd which, regardless of the red ribbon on his tail, had pressed close to his heels, had swung around behind Dickon and now dropped his muzzle on Dickon's shoulder as though seeking assurance. It was at that very moment that Cynthia broke into the little inner circle and jumped down from her saddle, the black reeling a bit as she did so. Both her small, gloved hands took the grimy fingers of Dickon.

"It was glorious!" cried Cynthia. "And —bless Wrack's heart! No other horse could have carried you through like him!"

Half of what she said sprang from fine impulse, but with the other half of her mind had she not closely calculated for the benefit of the spectators the effect of this picture of the charming girl, brilliant in her riding habit, standing with her hands in those of the tattered hunter, his scarlet coat ripped to pieces by his skirmish with the trees, his white trousers torn at the knee and splotched with mud from his fall; one side of his face terribly streaked with blood, and the white bandage around his head, that time honored symbol of the injured hero? He saw this clearly, and at a glance, and while he answered her with something deprecatory the murmur of the crowd around them assured him that the picture had taken effect. The hunt was turning back; already the talk was on other subjects when a broad man with an ugly face broke in close to Dickon and Cynthia.

"I've been working through the jam to congratulate you," said the newcomer. It was Silverman, as much beast in broad sunlight as at night. He was so ugly that he was fascinating.

"The congratulations go yonder," said Dickon, bowing to him with some restraint, for he knew that it was the face of Cynthia, appreciated by an unerring eye, that had brought Silverman to him. "There's the winner of the hunt." He pointed toward James Vincent.

"Tush!" grinned Silverman. "The second-best often wins out."

A flash in the corner of his little brute eye indicated Cynthia, and Dickon felt his striking muscles harden. Yet it was necessary; there was even a shade of expectancy in Cynthia's attitude; she seemed to wish to drain the cup of every success dry, and when he presented Silverman to her she smiled into the face of the grotesque. It made Dickon shudder.

"You're in the neighborhood with a party?" he asked coldly.

"A party is in the neighborhood with me," corrected Silverman. "Woodacre is my place. You'll drop over, eh? If you fish, Miss Rainey, I can show you a finely stocked stream with the whitest gravel you ever stepped on, and the trout are rising like herring at every shadow of a fly."

But, studying Dickon's expression, she had already judged and gauged the man. It pleased Dickon to see the cool pleasantness that took the place of her former smile.

"You're very kind," she said, and her nod was enough to dismiss him.

Her mount was hardly fit to bear a rider back, so one of the grooms who had arrived on the spot took charge of the black and Cynthia took a vacant place in an automobile. To see her in that gay riding outfit among the drab street clothes of the others was like seeing a flower among leaves. James Vincent, on the way back, reined away from the others and cantered beside Dickon. He was erect, grave, courteous, and for all those reasons Dickon knew the man was sad.

"I don't have to pretend with you, Dickon," he said. "You've won the first point. It was so damned well fought out that I don't mind it—a great deal. Nevertheless, I want to warn you that the fight isn't over."

"In such a battle as this," said Dickon carelessly, "first blood means a good deal, you'll admit?"

"But," smiled the arbiter, "when you've washed your face clear of blood she'll forget all about your fall; whereas to-morrow and the next day I shall still have the tail of Reynard."

Dickon smiled in turn. It was surpassingly pleasant to have James Vincent admit him openly on such equal terms of rivalry. "Quite right," he said, "but I shall cultivate a limp and that will remind her of the slide down the cliff. I'll balance my cliff against your fox-tail, Vincent."

They laughed, but their laughter broke off short as of one accord, and they sat their horses looking seriously at one another. They rode the rest of the way home in silence. The hard, sure feeling of triumph crystallized in Dickon as he reached the house. The very servants had heard. It is rare indeed for a well-trained body-servant to cast a second glance, but many a second glance fell to the part of Dickon when he strode down the hall. And in his room William North rose to meet the third master. He was as pale as his florid complexion allowed and the one hand behind his back, Dickon knew, was hard clenched to preserve his self control.

"A bully ride, North," said Dickon cheerily.

"I have heard, sir," said North in an uncertain voice. "I have heard all about it and—thank God you're safely back!"

He was so used to a restrained voice in his valet—it might, indeed, almost be called a polished voice—that Dickon was shocked by this burst of emotion. William North bustled rather aimlessly about the clothes which were already laid out, but Dickon was grown too thoughtful to notice. Two very real things had entered his life that day—Wrack and this proof of deep affection from his valet—and through contrast it seemed to Dickon that he had been living, lately, as a shadow among shadows.

The thought followed him when he went down to dinner—for the hunt, the long return, the talk at the hunt club, and the change after his return had taken the day—and indeed this gravity was eminently becoming in the hero of the hunt. So thought Cynthia Rainey, for at the table he found her eye steadily upon him at every pause in her talk. Her expression told him part of the story; the pallor and the silence of James Vincent told him the rest. Cynthia had made up her mind, and Dickon found himself adding up possibilities. The whole affair was finished, he could see; the vanity of Cynthia demanded no better match than Dickon—on this day at least—and he had only to speak before the glamour of the hunt had worn away from her imagination.

That was the starting point from which he went on to the forty millions which he now knew made up the fortune of William Rainey. Forty millions, in those days of high interest, meant some two millions and a half a year. Two millions and a half! He began to divide the prodigious sum into smaller portions to appreciate it.

It meant over two hundred thousand a month; it meant about seven thousand dollars a day—a handsome year's income every day of his life! Of course it was not all his, but the vast majority of it would be at his disposal, for he knew that the mother and father of Cynthia would be content to drift on the outskirts of her life, seeing, admiring, worshiping from a distance her social progress. He could travel through the world where he pleased; every door in Europe, in time, would be open at his approach. He could go through Italy and plunder the art shops; he could stock his wine cellar in France; he could buy his

horses in England, and some world-famous architect would plan his mansions in city and country. There, around his board, would gather whatever was most beautiful among women or wittiest and famous among men. And the heart of Dickon leaped!

It came very quickly after that. Passing out from the dining-room through the hall he came close to Cynthia, and when he spoke she stood still, her hair luminous, and her white arms and shoulders outlined, it seemed, by a penciling of light.

"I have to see you; may I?" said Dickon.

Her eyes widened a little, and her head tilted; she was letting him look straight into her eyes, and that is a thing which no woman will permit unless she does not care to hide a thing or unless she has nothing to hide. A harlot, a saint, a woman in love —their sisterhood shows in their eyes.

"I am going out on the terrace," she said. "Suppose you come out a bit later?"

He bowed, and as she strolled off down the hall, picking up young Lipton as she went, Dickon joined Mrs. Littleton's own group. It certainly would not do for him to go out immediately after Cynthia.

"It's said that he wishes to joint the hunt club," someone was saying.

"He'll probably get in, then," answered Mrs. Littleton. "Silverman generally gets what he wants, I understand. I bid against him for Woodacre, but Silverman won." She shrugged her shoulders and made a little gesture which might have meant anything. "They have a very gay party over there now, I understand?"

"Gay? I should say so! From Fanny Wain to Marie Guilbert!"

Dickon turned to a vase of flowers and let the pale blossoms drift softly through his fingers; the blood had rushed from his brain and centered around his heart. Mary Gilbert at Silverman's country place!

"May I speak to you?" he called to James Vincent.

The arbiter came to him.

"You look like the devil, Dickon. I fear the hunt did you up."

"Not a bit. I have to ask a favor of you."

"Ah!" was all that came from Vincent.

"It's a very important one. I've made an engagement with Cynthia to meet her on the terrace in a few moments, and now I'm called away."

"Can't you tell her that?"

"I—Vincent, it's impossible for me to see her. I'm going to ask you to speak to her and make my excuses."

Blood rushed into the pale face of James Vincent, and it sickened Dickon. This man truly loved the girl.

Obviously, words poured up to the teeth of Vincent, but he checked them with trembling lips.

"Of course," he said, "I'll do what you wish."

And Dickon added slowly, "I don't know what you're thinking just now, Vincent, but I don't think your imagination is going too far. I can't say any more than that."

He turned on his heel and left the hall. Before midnight he knew Cynthia Rainey would be engaged to James Vincent. She would accept him out of sheer pique, if nothing more.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DICKON ENTERS THE DARK.

MRS. LITTLETON kept two machines constantly at the disposal of her guests, but Dickon preferred to walk. He could not think, as yet, and he hoped that a brisk swing across country would bring him back to normal; yet with the three winding miles of country road behind him, and the mighty trees of Woodacre looming black before him, his mind was still a chaos. He did not know what he would do when he saw her, but see Mary Gilbert he must.

In the hall he gave his message to one of the servants: Mr. Dickon Greene wished to speak for a moment with Marie Guilbert.

Then he sat down to wait; but he could not remain still and had to rise and start pacing swiftly back and forth. There was a hum of exciting music somewhere. It seemed to him that by the sound of that music alone he could have identified Silverman's; then a door opened and a shrill feminine laughter floated down to him, cut

away in the middle by the closing of the door again.

A light footfall. He turned and found Mary Gilbert all in white, standing at the turn of the great stairs—it was a place of shadows, with only a single high light shining on her shoulder as on a crystal. A pale hand rested on the balustrade.

"Hurry back!" called a man's voice from above.

Still she did not stir, and Dickon went to the foot of the stairs, keeping his eyes fixed on her as though he feared she would dissolve if his glance flickered away. Then she came down a step at a time until Dickon caught a faint scent of violets—that shadow at her corsage was a bunch of them—a dull purple shadow that made her throat seem so white.

"Mary!" he said.

But she stood on the lowest step just above him and looked sadly down the hall past him. Then the horror which was in the back of Dickon's brain all the time since the first news that she was at Silverman's, came rushing across his consciousness. He caught her hands and crushed them to waken her to some emotion.

"Why are you here?" he muttered.

"I was lonely," she answered simply.

His knees trembled. He wanted to fall before her and beg forgiveness. So much lay in three words!

"Mary, Mary—when did you come to Silverman's?"

"I don't know!"

He reeled against the balustrade.

"For God's sake, Mary, tell me! When did you come into this beast's house?"

"This morning, I think."

"This morning? Only this morning? God be praised for that! But—Mary—what in the name of Heaven—why didn't you answer my letter that—"

"What letter?"

"Mary! You received none?"

"Nothing!" But her dull languor was ripped to shreds and light gleamed in her face. Now her hands flashed up and rested on his shoulders. "Dickon, Dickon, Dickon, in the dear name of God tell me true—you did write?"

"On my soul, I said—"

"Don't tell me what. I don't want to know what the words were as long as I have you here to *speak* words. But, ah, how long *do* I have you? How long will she let you stay away?"

"There is no one else!"

"Dickon, they've taught you how to lie. You mustn't. You see, I know. I know that you risked your life to-day so that you could shine in her eyes. And you won!"

"I tell you, Mary, there are some things that a man only learns at the very elbow of death. And I learned when I risked my life for another woman to-day: that you alone are what I want. And I have come in time for you, Mary. Tell me that, dear?"

"Yes, Dickon, in time. I think. But—"

"No thinking. No 'buts.' Come with me."

"Only while I get clothes to—"

He drew her toward the door. He swung it open. Before them the lights went glimmering down the great stone steps and into the dark heart of the night.

"I mustn't go with you. Why, Dickon—"

"Mary, you're crying! Oh, my dear!"

"I can't help it. People will say—"

"Damn people and what they say! I've been hounded by the thought of that. And all at once, standing here in the hall and looking up to you on the stairs, I knew that there are only two critics of a man: one is his own higher self and the other is the woman he loves. Mary, will you come down with me?"

"Dickon, we can never come back again!"

"God be praised!"

They went out under a starless sky. "Wait," she said, "I want to stand here and let other things blow into this dream—the smell of the wet trees and the wet ground—I want the feel of the wind—I want enough so that I'll know it is true and not a dream."

They paused with the wind puffing at them, first from one side and then from another, a clinging wind, heavy with the feel of rain.

(The end.)

Toot Sweet

By HENRY C. VANCE

STUFFY CONKLIN could play first base. The sad part is he thought he could sing it, too. At the start of that memorable season when Stuffy Conklin joined us my cohorts were going after that American League flag tooth and toe nail.

But, say—there is considerably more veracity than free verse in the bard's pome about wine, women and song. Especially is this so with the latter. Song boisterously butted in and threw the disposition of every son of a gun on my ball club out of focus. Conklin was the sweetest first sacker maddened microbes had lamped in ages. I almost got this phenom for a song, and maybe that's the reason there was a bounce back to the deal. Stuffy went up after the high pegs like a blimp, covered more ground than a spring freshet, could hit any kind of pitching, and bust any kind of stitching.

When my scout had first written back boosting him like a patent-medicine ad, it sounded too good to be authentic. After the yawping youngster reported, however, I realized the ivory hunter was right for once—and that's a pretty good average for a scout, at that. My man nad sworn he would be a find, and by so swearing he had sowed no wild oats.

Highpockets McConnell had been on first for me, but Mack was so weak with the bludgeon he found it difficult even to bat his eye. The arrival of Stuffy Conklin in our midst solved a problem, and a vision of first division clogged my cranium. Probably the leopard, though, has one weak spot, and we got hep to Conklin's mainest flaw on our first road jaunt.

He had gone bugs about singing, and the pitiful part was his voice reminded you of the ice in a julep—cracked. That bird thought so well of his vocal chords that John McCormack was just a novice in his estimation and looked like the dub from Dublin.

What you gonna do with a fella like that? Shooting anybody at sunrise spoils one's whole day! When we was on the old cinder spreader, 'way into the night this Conklin cuss would be up in the smoker trying to hit all the notes in the deck, and not registering a bull's-eye on any of 'em. He tackled every known selection, too. One

minute he would shatter the ozone with "Ain't We Got Fun"—which emphatically we had not—and then, to show that he was a handicap artist, he'd hop on the Sextet from Lucy—and he'd murder all five of 'em.

One week of this discord demon, and everybody was as nervous as a pony ballet doing a interpretive St. Vitus jazz. Nerves all shot to pieces—grouchy over loss of sleep—they were ready to murder Stuffy at the bargain rate of two bits.

My tossers would probably have crowned him with a bat if I hadn't anticipated as much, and begged 'em to lay off him; even requesting that they make no razzing remarks about his awful voice. See? He was supersensitive, and I feared he might get peeved, and pull a slump, or jump, or something.

"But, Bill, for the love o' Mike! Something has got to be done!" argued Wally Nolan. "We ain't got a iota of sleep for a week."

"Wally's right," broke in Red Roberts. "That gazabo imagines he's a music shark, but I'll bet he thinks Sherbert's Serenade is a dessert, and the only Wagner he ever heard of is Honus, what used to ride the range around short for the Pittsburglars." Red could sure swing a nasty adjective when he got het up.

"But, boys—" I remonstrated.

"But nothing!" ejaculated Greasy Hall. "Time has come for concerted action against this inhuman concertina."

"Just gimme time," I pleaded. "This pesky road trip winds up soon, and I'll give you my word I'll write out a plan to muzzle this baby by the time we get back home."

With that promise they stalked from my august presence, but apparently were still as disgruntled as a covey of hornets. It was up to me to do a meditation waltz—and think.

Here I was with a hitting hellion, and if I lost him it meant a miss out on first division. But in order to keep the rest of my machine intact I must stop his pitiful efforts at harmony.

You'd of had to heard Stuffy sing to appreciate our miseries, and you probably did hear him if you lived within ten miles of the railroads we traveled on. The only fundamental of songhood that lad had was volume. When he bore down on a minor you could of heard him in Asia Minor or some other seaport town. He slung the wickedest and most painful Adam's apple which has ever fallen into my acoustic racks. One siege of it, and you had a headache like you was on the tenth lap of a lemon-extract hangover.

Throughout the trip Stuffy kept up his crusade against pitchers, and also his campaign versus the Sharp and Flat brothers. He was the champion do-re-mi dissembler of all time.

Imagine me in my lower, trying to snatch off some slumber, and this Stuffy cranking up on his basso, and bearing down on "Asleep in the Deep." Asleep, my eye! Nobody could of been asleep in the deep, or nowheres else, with this geek splitting the air as consistently as a sporting editor splits an infinitive.

No sooner had we parked our dogs in the old home town, following the road trip, than everybody on the pay roll makes a bee-line for me, and I could tell when I seen 'em coming that they had innumerous blood in their glims.

Wally Nolan was spokesman. "Well, Bill, you promised us relief. Have you doped out a way to work the gag rule on Mr. Conklin?"

His tones carried a heavy tonnage of sarcasm.

I hadn't let no Bermuda grow under my trilbies, as I was one of the mainest sufferers from this dread discord disease.

"Yep, boys," I said. "I think I got the answer."

Red Roberts looked doubtful.

"Spill it," he demands. "I'm desperate. If that bird has a relapse on the next trip I'll have to join the coke-sniffers' union, and I don't want to pull that neither, for you know what Novocain done to Abel!"

"Your Uncle Dudley always thinks up something original," I boasts. "I put the old logic to work, figuring somebody had intimated to this baby he could sing. Working on this theory I found out a Mme. Brinskelli is giving him lessons in voice."

The boys were gathered around me like the kids of Israel must of surrounded Mose in the wilderness—or was it General Lee what was there?

" As soon as I got hep to that fact something definite began to percolate through my brain. Here's the plot: a committee, with me as chairman, and Red, Wally and Greasy, will make a mast formation on the studio of this Brinskelli burglaress, and try to persuade her for the great diamond's sake to lay off Stuffy before he gets lumbago of the larynx! Do you get the idea?"

" I gotcha the first time," replies Wally, " and I'll get down on my knees to this Missus Brins-whosit and beg her in the name of suffering Cæsar to discourage this croup-chested bird."

Electing ourself members of the conspirators' cult, we planned to visit the Brinskelli hangout next morning, and beg for mercy from her of the hairpin sex. And, as per schedule, we assembled next day, and as we hoofed it toward the studio I was busy running over a speech in my mind, for as a ad-libber they ain't nobody home with me. I got to know my lines. Only thing I ever got off impromptu like was a few dammits and something from the obscenery.

As we nears the building they comes a wail from the second-story window, like one of Mr. Dan T.'s characters might be writhing in inferno. We all emulate a period. They's something familiar in that gear-stripping shriek.

" Hell's bells!" I ejaculates. " We can't go up there now!" I turns to survey my comrades, and their grin acreage looks like a lien on Texas.

" It's Stuffy, sure," remarks Wally. " What we gonna do?"

" They ain't but one thing we *can* do,, and that's hide out somewheres and wait for him to show something aggressive," counsels I.

So we park in a corner drug store, while Stuffy goes through the agony of another song. After a final woeful wail in the studio there's a lapse of sweet, granulated and unadulterated silence, and then Stuffy pulls an exit and struts up the street whistling. Following his departure, we make a hookslide for Mme. Brinskelli's mansion of melodies, and she meets us at the main entrance with a epidemic of grins. Evidently she thinks we're new suckers. Features sharp as a meat ax, one of them indefinite noses of roaming architecture, a pair of cheaters over little, squinty glims, which ain't much bigger that a dot on a lower-case i, tall and hungry looking—that was she.

" What can I do for you, gentlemen?" A low, sweeping bow accompanies her query.

" You can save our lives!" grumbles Wally.

I nudges him sharply in the ribs, and gives him the office to leave the lingo to me.

" Mme. Brinskelli, I—ah—er—that is we have come to you on rather an unusual mission."

She beckons us into the studio, and my three hirelings flop themself on a sofa that must of come over in the Plymouth Rock, or Mayflower. It was one of them red-plush affairs with bow legs, like Honus Wagner used to disport hisself in.

" What we've come to see you about, *madame,* is Mr. Stuffy Conklin." I tapped my foot awkwardly on the worn carpet, and she took a pencil from the sikey knot in her henna nest, and patted it across her lips is puzzled fashion.

" Stuffy Conklin? I don't seem to place the gentleman." She went off into a deep, brown study, and then clapped her hands gleefully. " Oh—I've got it now! You mean Horatio Artagus Conklin?"

" We all know him by the name of Stuffy," I explains. " The man I'm referring to just left here."

" Sure!" she replies. " He came here this morning for his voice."

" So, this is where he left it when we went on the road?" growls Wally.

I presses down on his bunion rack as a signal for silence.

Me? I was getting impatient. " *Madame,* I'm not a man to men's words. As a first sacker this here Stuffy has got anything north or south of the equator beat to a frazzling whisper, but as a singer he's nill and void. Now, my dear lady, if that boy can sing bass. Cactus Cravath is a sprinter.

"But notwithstanding the grating sound of his horrible voice, he insists on exercising his lungomotion every and anon. On the recent road trip about the only sleep my boys got was on the bases. Can't you appreciate the awful predicament we are in? We desire to arouse your sympathy, so you will up and tell Stuffy his voice is cracking under the strain—or has already cracked. Please, dear woman, won't you tell him the awful truth and discourage him in these vocal lessons?"

No oil-stock salesman ever pleaded more eloquently. I realized she was going to be as hard to handle as a Texas Leaguer.

"My dear sir"—and she looks coldly into my glims—"you forget that teaching music is my art and avocation. Should I comply with your request it would be the means of tearing down a clientele what it has took me a lifetime to build."

I admit I was stumped, so I let Wally rave when he jumped to his dogs. Believe me, that boy was there with the old debating powers. He sent *madame* an appealing look and then commenced his outburst of eloquence.

"I'm one of the sufferers, and if this thing keeps us I'm going to pull a Murphy bed and collapse. Far be it from me to ask you to make a financial sacrifice. I have a simple little plan that will make nobody the losers." Wally paused here to park his cud of plug cut in the port side of his jaw.

"I try to be fair with everybody," chimed in the *madame*. "Just what is your plan, Mr.—ah—er—Nolan?"

"I ain't asking that you abandon the talented Mr. Conklin, but why can't you teach him something else, like penmanship or embroidery? They wouldn't be no objectionable noises to run folks crazy if he followed them arts."

"You do me honor," she gurgled. "I ain't so versatile. Voice is my main forte." Then a happy thought seemed to hit her right between the nose. "But I have a sister who teaches expression. Now, if I could persuade Horatio Artagus to follow the Demosthenesian art—ah, that would solve the difficulty."

"You win!" shouted Red Roberts.

"That's the idea!" I joyously yelped. "Get sister to teach him expression, and the problem is solved."

We bowed our thanks profusely, edged toward the door, and bade the *madame* farewell. We wanted to duck before she changed her mind—you know how women are.

Maybe the bunch wasn't happy! All figured Stuffy would get busy on his elocuting, and we'd snuggle away in the hay, and join the cult of R. V. Winkle. Sweet mommer! My club was sailing along in high, steadily climbing. Stuffy was emulating the bombardment of Poet Arthur, and harmony prevailed.

Two afternoons later we're breezing parkward on a trolley, and Stuffy is seated in front of me, poking his head in a pamphlet.

I asks him: "What, ho, in litrachoor?"

He looks up with a muttonish grin. "It's a little pome by the name of 'Casey at the Bat,' and maybe here was one bird who didn't flivver in the pinch! I'm learning it by heart."

I looks at Wally slyly, and he hands me a knowing wink.

"Going in for Willie Shakespeare?" I nonchalantly interrogates.

He grins. "Nothing heavy—I ain't strong enough. But they's no use of letting your talents go to waste, and you'd be surprised how interesting the study of elocuting is."

"Speech! Speech!" says Wally, before I could stop him; but luckily the sarcastic remark went over Stuffy's dome and no harm was done.

Everything was chicken for the remainder of the home stay. And when we started tearing mileage again my club was in a alley apple's throw of first place. But if everything worked out as planned the adding machine makers and the cash register hatcheries would be dark for the rest of this life.

Theories are all right—but they never win the war.

That first night all realized we had been booted, and I doped it that the only way we would ever get any sleep would be to inaugurate an ether-issue at every meal.

Great addling antics of asparagus! We had hopped right out of the flaming fricassee into the furnace. We had been triple-crossed instead of double-crossed, with Stuffy and the Brinskelli sisters starring in the skit.

Stuffy had clung to his vocal lessons like a nickel nurses to a rain check, and on top of that he'd taken up expression too. Oh, Mr. Job, what was a gross of boils or so compared to this?

Stuffy continued to murder Mother Macree and all the little Macrees in ice-cold blood. Then he'd switch over and recite Casey. After that he'd crack down on "Silver Threads Betwixt the Gold." I've set in a dentist's chair and let the old boy probe the interior of my collar bone with an ice pick, and never entered a protest. But I'm admitting the agonies of listening to this Stuffy was enough to drive even Pussyfeet Johnson to drink.

It looked like mob law would prevail next day. My huskies was in little groups, whispering at each other, and from all appearances the Soviet sisters had been spreading red propaganda. As a matter of fact, I didn't feel like rushing up and kissing nobody myself—except with a baseball bat or something—and one of my first impulses the night before had been to increase the national death rate by one, choking Stuffy to his reward.

But you get the idea? It was a crucial period. My ball club had reached the crest, and it was mainly due to Brother Conklin's cantankerous clubbing. Consequently, why shouldn't I be able to put up with a few sleepless nights? Our team was drawing like a flock of flackseed poultices, and we was getting the filthy Lucretia at the box office in gob lots.

Protect Stuffy Conklin from bodily harm, and see that his feelings wasn't hurt—that was my motto. I wore one lung to a frazzle and ruined the fenders on both my tonsils arguing with the boys. I reminded 'em we would probably win the pennant and get in on the world's series dough, if they would hands-off. That shot got 'em; they agreed to grin and bear it.

But from then on that little word siesta was a fake. However, we finally got back home with everybody able to take nourishment, and we was in first place. Sweet Cicero! Pulchritudinous Patootie! Dusting off the S. R. O. sign at the old orchard was imperative. And with two weeks' home stay confronting 'em, the boys seemed more cheerful.

A coupla days after our triumphant return Stuffy comes to bat in the seventh frame. He had already whammed out a triplet and a double, and the bleachers was yelling for him to park it. He swang two bats as he came up, pitched one back, hitched up his pants, and rubbed his hands in the dirt.

Bill Kircher was chunking 'em for the opposish. Bill wasn't no world beater, but he did have one of the fastest smoke balls I've ever seen. Kircher elects to cut that fast one loose. It was close in, and Stuffy expected a curve ball, not making no effort to duck or dodge. The ball made a bee-line for his dome.

Whack! The ball bounced off Stuffy's cranium—and some bleacherite caught it. When that apple collided with Mr. Conklin's skull it made a noise like the backfire of a flivver. Stuffy drops to the ground like a meteor out of focus, and I and the whole team rushes plateward.

"Are you hurt, Stuffy?" I shouts in a fit of incoherence.

Was he hurt? I might as well been talking to the corpse of the Wizzard of Oz. He was knocked as stiff as the sun total of rheumatic joints at Hot Springs, Arkansas. His eyes stood at attention like the glims of a sawdust poodle—glazed. He was tee-totally inanimate—whatever that is—and the boys were circled around him trembling like a aspirin leaf in a tornado.

Finally Umps Scotty McDonald—seeing that a man was bad hurt, and that nobody wasn't doing nothing to help him but wish him well—took the situation and a megaphone in his own hands and yelled: "Are they a doctor in the audience?"

Dr. Willard Auten climbs down over the box-seat railing, examines Stuffy, looks at the growing doorknob on his head, and shakes his own dome in worried fashion.

"Is it serious, doc?" It looked like my star was a total ruin.

"It's a fractured skull, or I miss my guess!" contributed the medico; "and the more time we lose in getting him to the hospital the less chance for recovery."

That was my cue to page an ambulance over the phone, and when I got back to the dugout Stuffy was still outen his head, but able to say something in the delirium lingo. He jabbered away: "The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine. . . . . They's a long, long trail. . . . . Save him, save the captain, as he staggered down the stairs." None of us dassent crack a smile. In his state of coma he had started reciting and singing.

The ambulance boys picked him up and toted him out to the car like he was a sack of shorts. The game? Oh, sure, we won it—for Stuffy had already put it on ice with his willow wizardry; but, believe me, we went at it in half hearted fashion.

It looked like I might turn white-headed overnight from worry. I didn't know how long this scintillating sinner would be laid up, but my worst fear was that it would be for a eternity. You know when a brain starts a little concussion, nine times out of ten somebody has got to page a set of pall-bearers what has got a open date and look up the jug of embalming fluid.

That night I visited the hospital and learned that consciousness hadn't returned; but I found Dr. Auten working like a Trojan over Stuffy. I stuck around that hospital like a hang-nail until ten bells, and when I checked out at the invalidery Stuffy was still cuckoo.

That night I rolled and tossed like the stormy billows offen Cape Hatteras. What if the poor boy should croak? It would wreck the chances of my ball club! I beat Old Sol up the next morning, paid homage to my cakes and coffee, grabbed my Kelly, and beat it for the hospital.

Dr. Auten is sitting in the office twiddling his thumbs.

"Have you seen the patient this morning, doc?" My query is all clogged with eagerness.

"Sure! Not only have I seen him this morning, but all night as well." He pats a yawn on the back.

"Has he recovered consciousness?"

"Oh, yes, he came to about eleven last night."

"How's he doing?"

"Very quiet this minute," smiles the M.D.—and it looks to me like there is a superflooity of twinkles in his glims.

"Is there a fracture?" I was up to my highest pitch of excitement by now.

"No, I hardly think so," grins the tongue gazer. "I've been treating him all night—and you can't imagine my prescription?"

I guessed iodine, for the medical profesh seems to think it will cure anything from divorces to dandruff.

"Nope—it's cotton." He follows the statement with a guffaw.

"Cotto, hell! I never heard of nobody treating a bean ball victim with cotton."

"Neither did I until last evening," responds the doctor, "but cotton it was. Exhausted my supply, and sent an orderly down to the druggist's for reënforcements."

"For the love o' Mike, don't hold out on me no longer!" I snaps. "I believe there is some kind of a gag to this."

"*Gag?* Yes, *gag* is undoubtedly the word." Then he laughs again, opens up, and does a narration skit. He takes a deep breath for a monologue marathon. "At eleven thirty last night Mr. Conklin returns to semiconsciousness with an—ah—er—bang. My first thought was that he had been thrown into convulsions by the bursting of a blood clot on his brain. You know that sometimes happens when one has a concussion?"

I nodded affirmatively to prod the yarn along.

"As his yelling progresses in volume and momentum it seems I'm able to pick up a thread of a tune here and there. You see, I have rather a keen musical ear."

He paused, and I grinned. Light was beginning to dawn.

"Unfortunately, however, my patients in the hospital here haven't that knack of piecing together tune puzzles, and as your Mr. Conklin bleated forth in all his fury pandemonium reigned. Two women, who were to have been operated on this morning, thought I had some poor victim on the table, torturing him. They took the Swoonville Limited. Later no amount of expla-

nation on my part would convince 'em of their mistake."

He clipped the end from a panetela, lighted it, and puffed.

Paroxysms of laughter was about to pile up into a Vesuvian outburst within me. I concluded that Stuffy had gone on another song spree.

"Yes," continued Doc Auten, "the entire inmatage of the infirmary was in a state of hysteria, and I realized that something had to be done with double-play rapidity. Stopping the vocal leakage in Mr. Conklin's resourceful lungs is like unto bailing the Atlantic with a thimble. I rammed a goodly supply of cotton in his mouth, and that gave him temporary relief until he swallowed it.

"I've spent my time packing in cotton all night. If the druggist doesn't deliver with a new supply, however, you will by no means find your Uncle Willard asleep. At present there is a strongly muscled Senegambian hovering near Stuffy's room, and if he masticates the cotton before more arrives I shall take delight in applying the stomach pump, with him of the silhouette complexion as pumper and the boisterous Mr. Conklin as pumpee. No outcry is possible with such an instrument going full tilt in one's throat."

Dr. Auten can't hold that flock of guffaws in reserve any longer. Neither can I —so we make it a twosome.

"Gosh, doc, I'm afraid that baby will die of lint on the lungs if you feed him any more cotton!" Then the germ of a great idea hits me—a remedy that 'll end all of our sleepless nights. Doc is a rabid fan, and I explains the plot to him. He acquiesces, and we repairs to Stuffy's room to put the plan in execution.

He's laying up there in bed with his mouth stuffed so full of boll-weevil food that it looks like he has contracted a case of double mumps.

The doctor is spokesman. "Now, Stuffy, I'm going to remove the fleecy staple, if you'll promise to make no utterance while I'm diagnosing your case—one of the most baffling science has yet come in contact with." Mr. Conklin nods his promise, and the doc unfolds the plot. "Stuffy, you've got a badly fractured skull, and your condition is serious."

That was a lie, but the doc was ready to strain a point if it would help us put out a winner.

"Yes, sir." Stuffy gulped this reply like some undertaker already had him for a half-Nelson or full-Stilson.

"Your peculiar condition makes it absolutely necessary that you lead a quiet life. You seem to have an unusual gift for singing, but this must be taboo in the future."

"How come?" There was a pitiful tone in Stuffy's voice.

"As a safeguard against your demise," argued the surgeon. "Henceforth, if you should raise your voice in song, the strain would affect your fracture and instant death would result."

The doc spoke as convincingly as an engraved affidavit.

Stuffy was persistent. "But that won't necessarily make me give up expression too, will it?"

This question came just like a drowning man grabbing at a straw.

"Undoubtedly, yes," advised my coplotter. "To be a successful orator one must give vent to reverberant shouts. Such a strain might prove fatal."

Stuffy's eyes were revolving in their sockets and his jowls were shaking. Me? I couldn't hardly keep from busting out in a spasm of hilarity.

"It means I got to give up both voice and elocuting?" sighs Stuffy dolefully.

"Either that, or you maliciously invite brain concussion to strike you down. Do you promise?"

"Yes, sir." Stuffy got the pledge outen his system like his heart was about to pop in two.

I tried to make it light on him.

"It's really a crime, Stuffy," I says, "for you're undoubtedly a boy what's got music in his soul; but you must make this sacrifice hit at a career in the opry to keep from making the supreme sacrifice hit."

With that, I and the knife wielder hikes from the room, but before I left the hospital you can bet I thanked Dr. Auten for what he had done.

"Anything's fair in love and baseball," he replies. "I'd pull off any kind of a diagnosis if it 'd help us to win the pennant. Not a thing the matter with him but a knot on his head. Still, if I let him out too early he might get wise."

"Yes, doc," I concedes, "you got the right dope. I sure could use Stuffy mighty well, but I'll try and struggle along without him until we hit the road."

When I got down to baseball headquarters and spread the news about Stuffy's minor injuries, and told the boys of doc's warning to Stuffy, a general rejoicing took place. And, for the next few days, in spite of the temporary loss of my main mauler, we managed to hold our own. The day we was booked to start another tour Stuffy gets clearance papers from the hospital and prepares to hop off with our outfit.

At ten thirty that night Stuffy stalks through the aisle of our car with a duo of bulky suit cases. Some of us are setting in the smoker holding a fanning bee when Mr. Conklin passes through. Then Wally Nolan gives me a significant look and chirps:

"I wonder why the extra baggage?"

"Dunno." That was my only comeback.

A few minutes later Stuffy enters the smoker with the big black grip in tow. He flops in a chair and mops perspiration from his dome. This done, he opens the grip, and our mouths is all agape as he starts putting together the most gigantic saxophone I've ever saw.

From the expression of horror on several faces, I feels like the acrobatic spirits of ammonia is going to be needed soon.

Stuffy fits in the mouthpiece and gives one air-splitting blast on that tempestuous trumpet. Then he looks over at me with a fiendish grin.

"Bill, old dear," he says, "I guess you spoke yourself a parable when you opined I was a lad with music in his soul. That's identically the case, and being that your surgical shark didn't say nothing about blowing horns being dangerous to my fracture I bought this here baby."

I'm too horror-struck to say anything, and I just set there like a man in the electric chair waiting for the juice to be turned on.

"Ought to be a pipe to play it," he says, "for the darn thing looks like one."

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AMBITION

ONE fresh spring morning, in a lonely wood
Beside a silver-threaded stream I stood,
And watched it fighting onward in its course.
Making its path among the stones by force,
Impatient of the obstacles it met,
Oft thrust aside by rugged bowlders set
Within its bed, yet pausing not to stay,
The restless streamlet hastened on its way,
Eager to blend its current with the flow
Of the wide-bosomed river down below,
And ever restless and dissatisfied
Till it was lost within that mighty tide.

Grace Irene Chafee.

The Taming of Hard-Boiled Helgar

By HARRY ADLER

A GOLD dredging camp is no nest of weaklings. To earn the sobriquet of "hard-boiled" in such a community one must be indeed of super-adamantine consistency. But no one disputed the right of the dredge-master of Swan Camp to his appellation of Hard-Boiled Helgar. Standing six feet two, with a chest like a rivet keg, with jointed bucket pins for arms and fists like enormous bolt heads, he ruled his little kingdom with the iron policy of a czar.

"Treat 'em rough!" was his motto. "You've got to handle 'em that way," he would insist to Superintendent Ballinger, when the latter, on his inspection visits, would remonstrate against Helgar's inhuman methods. "What's the sense in arguing with a squarehead deckhand? There's one argument he'll savvy much quicker'n any other—a good, swift smash in the jaw."

Ballinger pondered deeply over the problem of his despotic dredge-master. The corporation's main operations were in California and Ballinger could make but occasional brief visits to the Swan Creek property in Colorado. Consequently, there had to be an efficient man in charge of the latter, especially since, due to climatic conditions, dredging operations in this locality were extremely difficult, requiring a person of considerable experience and resourcefulness. Helgar was a born dredgeman, having worked since boyhood in all the gold dredging camps of the world—from California to Australia, Alaska to Oregon and Colorado. His handling of the dredging machinery was perfect, but his handling of the far more important item, the human

crew operating that machinery—Ballinger shook his head and his brow wrinkled.

It was an extremely puzzling situation, but a situation for which a remedy would have to be found, for many reasons. For one thing, Ballinger's personal methods were in direct contradistinction to those of Helgar; furthermore, the latter's men, being dissatisfied with the conditions under which they were forced to labor, were constantly quitting, the labor turnover being an alarmingly expensive item. Ballinger also feared that some time Helgar's methods might result in a general insurrection, which would be both expensive and dangerous.

One person alone received from Hard-Boiled Helgar such a degree of tenderness as his nature permitted him to express. Alice Swanson, the sweet-eyed, golden-haired daughter of the camp handy man, had early caught the dredge-master's rough fancy, and since that day none of the unmarried youths of the camp had dared as much as cast a longing glance in the girl's direction, although many a heart ached and raged in secret.

Why Alice endured Helgar's attentions was a matter of considerable speculation around the bunkhouse stove. But the general opinion was summed up in Tony Ulrich's deduction; Ulrich was the oldest man in point of service on the dredge and was considered the camp sage.

"She's scared to offend him on account of her old man. She knows Hard-Boiled would take it out on old Axel if she turned him down flat—and what good is poor old Axel Swanson anywhere except in this here camp? He's too old to do any real work, and even here he's getting more than he's worth. The only reason Hard-Boiled pays him what he does is on account of the girl, I guess."

"God help her if she marries him," vouchsafed Jacobsen, the carpenter. "I'd rather be yoked to the devil than to Hard-Boiled Helgar."

"I don't think she will marry him," Ulrich replied. "She's got to sort of string him along for the old man's sake, but she ain't fool enough actually to go ahead and tie up to that loose fisted brute. If Axel died Hard-Boiled might just as well forget the girl; and even if the old man lives, I can't figure her making such a fool of herself."

Alice herself gave no indication of her innermost intentions. Helgar's attentions she accepted quietly, accepting him as partner at the dances and entertainments occasionally given in the camp clubhouse and in the town, ten miles distant. None knew whether Helgar had ever definitely proposed marriage; but as Ulrich shrewdly pronounced:

"If there's anybody Hard-Boiled is scared of, it's Alice. She's quiet and sweet, but just the same, those wide eyes of hers have got him buffaloed. He's scared to come right out and ask her to marry him. He knows he ain't considered as a likely candidate for a model husband, and he's just the least bit leery for fear of a turn down. He's sort of sparring round and waiting for a favorable opening, the way I figure it."

Such was the situation when, one day in early summer, a roughly clad young stranger approached Helgar and Ballinger, where they stood on the bank of the dredge pond. Ballinger had arrived a week earlier for a brief visit.

"Are you the boss of this outfit?" the stranger inquired of Ballinger.

"I'm the superintendent," the latter replied.

"Can you give me a job?"

Ballinger nodded toward Hard-Boiled Helgar. "Mr. Helgar is the dredge-master," he informed the stranger; "he does all the hiring."

The young man turned to Helgar. "Any chance to get on?" he queried.

"No—we're full," the dredge-master answered and turned his head in dismissal.

The other again addressed Ballinger, evidently recognizing superior authority

"I'm in pretty bad need of a job," he explained. "I'm not particular about the work—just as long as it's a job and a chance to earn some wages. I'm a good, steady worker—I'll make it worth your while."

His voice was straightforward and pleasing, and evidently impressed Ballinger, who studied keenly the clean-cut, youthful features, the firm, solid, well set figure beneath the rough corduroys.

" Can't you use this young chap, Helgar?" he inquired. " He looks like a good worker and you can always fire him if he doesn't come up to snuff."

" We're full handed right now," Helgar insisted. " So far as I know none of the men are quitting; besides, all he'd be good for would be a deckhand, and we can always pick one up in town if any one should quit suddenly."

" I need a good winchman out in California," Ballinger rejoined, " and I'm thinking of taking Joe Domrowski out with me. You'll then have to advance one of the oilers to the winch and put one of the deckhands to oiling; that will leave you a deckhand shy, where you can use this fellow."

With a scowl Helgar turned to the applicant.

" All right, get aboard the boat and I'll be along and show you what to do after a while. I suppose you'll quit in a day or two anyway," he sneered; " too hard work, or something like that. You fellows that tramp across country without any baggage never do stay for more than just a taste of of a day or two of dredge work."

" My baggage is in Sunset. They told me in town that there were probably good chances for a job out here, so I hiked out; ten miles isn't a bad walk. And I guess I can stand the work all right."

The youth's eye met unflinchingly the venomous green sneer.

" What's your name?" asked Helgar.

" Jack Stream," the other answered.

Seeing Helgar had nothing more to say, the new deckhand walked around the edge of the pond and signaled the winchman, high in his cupola aboard the dredge, to lower the gangplank.

It was not an auspicious beginning for Stream. In the first place, he had appealed to Ballinger after having been refused by Helgar, which offended the latter's sense of pride; then, he had been hired practically by Ballinger over Helgar's head, another blow to the dredge-master's sensibilities. Another irritation to Helgar was the calm directness with which Stream met the blazing glance that had caused so many sturdy men to shrink instinctively. No occasion for an explosion presented itself, Stream quietly and efficiently performing all tasks to which he was assigned, never uttering a word of protest, no matter how arduous the labor. But Helgar never considered a man a properly constituted member of his crew until he had either physically or spiritually cowed the newcomer; consequently, everybody in camp considered it but a matter of time before the clash must come.

Then, a few days after his advent, as if his introduction had not been under sufficiently adverse circumstances, Jack Stream must begin taking distinct notice of Alice Swanson! The first day, out of malice, Helgar had assigned Jack to the " graveyard " shift, working from eleven o'clock at night till seven the following morning; but it immediately developed that this gave the enterprising youth considerable time during the day, while Helgar was about his duties on the dredge, to perch on the steps of the Swanson frame cabin, entertaining Alice as she sat on the porch sewing. Helgar promptly switched Jack to the day shift, but the latter had had too great a start. Quickly cleaning up after coming off duty, and getting through supper, Jack would betake himself to Alice's cabin. Not a bit deterred by the prior presence, perhaps, of Hard-Boiled Helgar, he would boldly mount the porch and forthwith consider himself one of the party. The presence of Alice was undoubtedly the only influence that restrained Helgar from taking one swift swing at the intruder's jaw. Nor would he deign to enter into recognized rivalry with his deckhand. A few minutes after Jack's arrival Helgar would depart, but the gleam in his eye was highly expressive.

Jack Stream, from the first, had made friends of his fellow workers by his pleasant, friendly manner, and Tony Ulrich, out of kindness, drew the boy aside one day for a few words of caution.

" You're riding for an awful fall, young feller," he admonished the other. " Hard-Boiled Helgar ain't no guy to monkey with."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

" That's nothing to me," he said. " I'm not interfering with him."

" Hard-Boiled considers Alice Swanson

as his claim, all staked out and filed on. Looks now like you're inclined to dispute title with him. If you're just fooling, take my advice and cut it out. Hard-Boiled ain't the guy for that. And if you're serious—well, forget it just the same. Helgar will just naturally smear up the camp with you."

The youth grinned cheerfully.

"Maybe," he agreed; "and then, again, maybe not. Anyhow, when I see a thing I want, I go after it. Sometimes I get it and sometimes I don't. But I make a damn good try for it. I'm ready to make affidavit that Alice Swanson is the girl I want to marry, and I don't care who knows it, which includes the hard-boiled gent."

"How about Alice—how does she feel about it?" ventured Tony.

"Well, I'm a modest young man," answered Jack, "but I don't think she exactly hates me. The trouble is," he went on, "everybody is so cussed scared of this bird Helgar. Alice, of course, isn't afraid on her own hook, although I wouldn't put beating a woman beyond him. She's just suffering from the same awe of him that the rest of you fellows are."

"We know him," grimly retorted Tony.

The other scoffed sarcastically.

"Bunk!" he snorted. "All these hard-boiled birds are just bluffs. They're mostly cowards at heart and if you just stand up to them they tame down mighty fast."

"Not Hard-Boiled Helgar," affirmed Tony with conviction. "Young feller, if you want to buck him, all right, that's up to you. I like you and I thought I'd warn you; but beyond that it's no business of mine. You're of age, I guess, and anyway, I ain't been appointed your guardian. But under no circumstances don't you proceed with the idea that Helgar is just a bluff and a coward, because he sure ain't neither one of them. I ain't got no use for him at all, but I'm here to tell the world that his nerve is as cast iron as his fist. I once seen him when the bone of his nose was crushed by a falling bar; he just stuck the end of a lead pencil up his nose and pushed the crushed bone back in place. He stuffed a piece of cotton in to stop the flow of blood and went right on with his work. He never batted an eyelash. No, young feller, he ain't no coward."

"Well," Jack replied, "any time he gets ready to look for me he won't need any search warrant to find me. I'll be right around here, waiting for him and ready. And I think Mr. Hard-Boiled Helgar is going to get a surprise."

At which, shaking his head dolefully at the boastful stubbornness of youth, Tony Ulrich walked slowly away.

At another time Tony essayed, out of the privilege of his position in the camp, to speak to Alice on the subject.

"Alice," he said, "what are you trying to do to this Jack boy?"

The girl's soft cheeks crimsoned and her lovely blue eyes widened a bit; but her glance never wavered.

"What do you mean, Tony?" she parried. "I didn't know I was doing anything—in particular."

He shook his iron-gray head.

"Don't fool with me, Alice," he reproved her. "You know you can't get away with it with me. You know well enough what I mean. Jack is hanging around your porch altogether too much for his health. He's a nice kid, and I hate to think of Hard-Boiled getting started on him."

Alice's color rose higher and she tossed her head in the air.

"This camp," she declared, "has been a camp of cowardly babies long enough. I'm glad to see that at last some one has come here who is man enough to stand up against Mr. Helgar and look him square in the eye."

"Fine talk for a woman," sadly protested Tony. "But has Hard-Boiled ever rammed that fist of hisn into your mouth? And do you think this young hero boy of yourn will be able to stand up against him for a minute?"

"Better take a beating like a real man than cringe like a coward," she flashed back.

"Do you consider you're doing Jack a kindness by inciting him this way to go and offer himself for mincemeat?"

"I'm not doing anything of the kind—I'm not inciting him to anything. Jack Stream is his own boss and can do as he

pleases. But if he finds pleasure in my company and"—her voice faltered a bit and her eyes drooped — " and if I find pleasure in his, he's welcome to come calling on me; and if by so doing he lays himself open to physical danger, it certainly isn't to his shame that he continues."

Tony Ulrich threw up his hands in despair.

" All right, you two young idiots," he cried disgustedly, " go to it! What's it to me? I've done my darnedest to save Jack from the most thorough licking that one man ever got from another, and still lived. But have it your own way."

It was about three or four weeks after Jack's arrival in the camp that the long expected explosion came. Jack was at work on the deck of the dredge gathering up the scattered bolts and rivets that had been left lying about after some brief repairs just completed. Beyond him the gigantic manganese steel buckets traveled, with racking noises, in their endless circling, tearing out enormous bites of earth and rock, carrying them upward and dumping them into the hopper, and then diving once more below the pond's surface for fresh mouthfuls. Within the housing, behind him, the powerful motors hummed and the great, cylindrical steel screen steadily revolved, washing through its pores the mingled gravel and gold, spurning at its lower end the rocks and bowlders, to be ejected from the boat via the rock chutes and stacker.

Above the terrific din of the machinery the voice of Hard-Boiled Helgar fell sharp on Jack's ears.

" What in hell are you wasting your time on now, Stream?" the dredge-master demanded.

Jack rose from his knees by the pail into which he had been collecting the litter.

" I'm cleaning up this stuff," he explained.

" Funny how you manage to discover the nice, soft jobs," sneered Helgar. " Do you think you're paid to loaf on kid's jobs like that when there's other work to do?"

" Since there aren't any ' kids ' working around this boat," answered Jack, " I don't see who you'd expect to do this. Perhaps the winchman?" His voice was quiet and even, but instinctively he knew the moment of test had arrived. " Besides," he went on, " you yourself told me to get things cleaned up around the deck, and that's just exactly what I'm doing."

Hard-Boiled Helgar's face blackened and his eyes blazed with fury.

" Are you talking back to me?" he roared. A lurid stream of obscenity leaped from his lips.

The raised voices had caught the attention of the other members of the crew. They all sensed what was impending. Tony Ulrich, at the winch, threw out the main power switch and leaped down the iron ladder leading from the winch room to the deck; the oiler, greasing the spud suspension sheaves, descended from the gantry with dangerous rapidity; the two shore men, working on the " deadman " on the bank, dropped their tools and sprang for the rope dangling from the end of the elevated gangplank and clambered aboard. In a moment the six or eight men comprising the day shift were grouped in dead silence about the two opponents.

" Since hitting this camp you've been altogether too cocky," Hard-Boiled Helgar snarled; " it's time for you to learn your place and I'm here to teach it to you."

He lurched forward and his enormous fist lunged viciously. When the swing started, Jack's face occupied that portion of the cosmos where the lunge would have reached the acme of its force. But—Helgar spun completely round from the force of his swing, and before he could recover himself there drove into his body a breath sucking smash, seconded immediately by a duplicate to the face.

That first instant of fighting shot to Hard-Boiled Helgar's brain the realization that here he was up against an entirely new brand of opponent. All his previous conflicts had been ended by two or three crushing blows. Perhaps this battle would have ended in similar fashion — could he but have landed the blows. But quicksilver itself was not more elusive than Jack Stream. At the first exchange Tony Ulrich, with keen shrewdness, had reached down and snatched out of the way the

heavy pail of bolts and rivets, thus permitting Jack a free deck for his lightning side slips.

The battle was but a repetition of the old tale of scientific skill versus brute force. Desperately Helgar flailed away, but his blows either swept through wide air or fell upon protectingly braced forearms or hunched shoulders; it seemed impossible to break through that perfect defense and reach a vital spot. Jack, for his part, dancing lightly about his opponent, drove smash after smash through the other's wild swings, each thudding drive to the body sucking the breath even from the awed spectators. From the hips, from the shoulders, from no start at all those blows leaped with electric swiftness and crashing force.

Even the iron system of Hard-Boiled Helgar at length began to break under this punishment. His breath came in gasps; his face was but a bloody pulp, and at every lurching swing he stumbled weakly. Repeatedly he fell crashing to the deck, but each time his stubborn will dragged him to his feet again. At length he stood, weaving helplessly; he made a last, feeble lunge, over-balanced, and, the struggle having wavered towards the boat's edge, he plunged into the muddy water of the pond.

A howl of derisive laughter rose from the spectators, and that shout carried away with it Hard-Boiled Helgar's appellation.

Silently, unaided, streaming dirty water, Helgar clambered aboard. Without a backward glance he walked out the gangplank, slipped down the rope at the end, dropped to the ground, and strode off toward the camp, half a mile distant.

Behind, aboard the boat, Jack found himself the center of awed congratulations. His knuckles were cracked and bleeding; his arms and shoulders were sore and bruised; a bloody streak ran across his cheek where a glancing blow had stripped off the skin—beyond this he was unmarked and untouched by the battle.

That evening, after supper, washed, rubbed and dressed, Jack walked to the little cabin serving Superintendent Ballinger as headquarters during his stay in camp. Ballinger had left a few days after Jack's arrival, going on a trip of inspection of some proposed new ground in Wyoming, but had returned a day or two ago.

Ballinger was seated at his battered desk when Jack entered. The superintendent's face lighted with a grim smile.

"Well," he said, leaning back in his chair and nodding Jack to a seat, "I understand your made good on your contract. From what I hear around camp you made good one hundred per cent. The job simply couldn't have been done better."

Jack shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"There was nothing to it," he remarked. "He was the easiest thing I've ever tackled. He's just a big, overgrown ox, with an awful punch, but without the skill to direct it. If he had ever landed one of those wallops on me it would have been flowers and slow music. But I didn't need more than one eye and one leg to avoid them."

From a drawer in his desk Ballinger produced a check book.

"Well," he said, "you've earned your money. I suppose you'll want to get away to-morrow, now the job's done, so I'll give you your check now."

He dipped his pen in the inkwell, but Jack's voice halted him.

"No," the youth said, "I don't want to go away, and I don't want that check."

Ballinger laid down the pen and looked up in puzzled bewilderment.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," he said. "I thought our agreement—"

"Listen, Mr. Ballinger." Jack spoke slowly, thoughtfully, as if weighing each word. "When you showed up at Golden with your proposition, wanting a husky young athlete to give your dredge-master a well deserved licking, I jumped at the offer. I had just completed school and the idea promised some fun, with a handsome check attached. I was supposed to have attended the School of Mines to become a mining engineer, but like a lot of other fool young kids I had wasted a good deal of my opportunity, taking considerably more interest in athletics than in engineering. So your proposition was just the sort to appeal to me. But since I've been

here I have come to see things in a new light. I don't want that check as my reward. I think I have accomplished the purpose you had in mind. Helgar is just as good a dredge operator, but I think from now on he'll be considerably tamer in his handling of his men. I'd like as my reward, if I may ask it, sir, that you let me keep my job as deckhand. This dredging game has caught my fancy, and I believe I can make good in it, and after I get some practical experience to go with my theoretical education I think you'll find me of value to you."

"And is that all you want as your pay—a job decking?" Ballinger gasped in amazement.

"Yes," Jack replied; "that's all the pay from you. The balance of my reward"—and he grinned—"is waiting for me in old Axel Swanson's cabin, as soon as you give me your answer."

Speeding the Guest

By C. S. CALLAHAN

THIS idea of never telling your love, and letting concealment feed on your damaged cheeks is bad stuff, I'm here to inform you. Some live wire comes along pealing the merry marriage chimes, and all you wind up with is a piece of bum wedding cake.

Of course, one reason I never said anything to Ruth is because I don't seem to be able to find a position suitable to my ability. At least everybody I work for tells me that; and I've had a lot of jobs in the last two years. And then again, Ruth's father has more money than Carter has pills; and maybe he can't strangle a nickel till the buffalo moos for help.

I've been gone on Ruth Holland ever since—I was going to say ever since she wore short dresses, but of course she wears 'em shorter now then she did then. Still, I guess you can dope out what I mean.

Nobody but a real ink-slinger could give

you an idea of what a regular lalapaloosa Ruth is. As I don't happen to be one, the best I can do is to say that she makes one of Harry Fisher's magazine covers look like the blue-faced mandril up at the zoo, and let it go at that.

Our house is on Seventieth, near the park, and the Hollands live right opposite. Ruth and I went to the same grammar school, and afterward we were together at high school. In summer her folks and mine go down to Long Branch. Our place is next door to theirs, so naturally I see a lot of Ruth—especially when she goes swimming.

She reminds me of the wicked flea—not but what there's plenty of fellows who pursueth; but just when you think you've got your hands on her she's somewhere else. She's always keeping me guessing, and I'm never certain just how I stand. To be sure I know she likes me—or rather, she did—it may have been this brother and sister stuff for all I can tell. I've never been able to get up enough nerve to find out. She always was a regular icicle anyhow.

No petting parties, goo-goo stuff, or hand holding goes with her. Or they didn't till recently—now I'm not so sure.

And that father of hers! He's one holy terror. If there's anything in this transmigration of souls idea, why Simon Legree must have had a round-trip ticket. I've seen a lot of fellows who would take a poke at Jack Dempsey for two pins, just about curl up and be ready to pass away when old man Holland looked at 'em.

It isn't so much what he says, but he gives you the up and down about the way a royal Bengal tiger would size up a pink rabbit. It makes a man feel smaller than Singer's midgets. I know what ails him. Ruth's the only child, and he'd rather lose his right eye than see her married. Of course every fellow who meets her goes dippy right off the bat, so there's always a gang of saps hanging around their house.

If old man Holland had his way, he'd take a club and clean out the crowd; but Ruth's the boss, and after her comes Mrs. Holland, so the old man only wins show money in the betting.

Well, we all went down to Long Branch that summer as per usual program. Old man Holland trots up to town only once or twice a week. He's in the contracting business. I guess he got his gentle ways from handling pick and shovel artists. I have to come in to business every day; and you bet I'm trying my best to hold down this job, because father says the next time I get fired I'm liable to find a lot of lumps in my mashed potatoes. Father isn't as bad as old man Holland, but he can tear off a mean variety of discords when his angry passions rise. There was a blue haze around our house for three days after I ditched the family hearse. It cost over two hundred to have the old boat fixed—I was hoping we'd get a new one.

The Ruth Admiration Society got a horrible slam a few weeks ago. It was called the Count De Luna, first name something which sounded like Looeegee. Where she dug him up at, nobody knows; but she pokes around in a lot of queer places. She had a settlement bug for a while, and collected a bunch of specimens. Maybe this was one.

Anyway, however she found him, there he was, large as life; and it seemed as if he was camped for the summer. Her father had nothing to do with asking him to stay at the house; but as I said before, Ruth rules the ranch; and if the old man didn't like it, he was welcome to go out in the back yard and bite a tree.

I read a book on heredity once. It said the European nobility were noted for their polished manners, but this seems to let 'em out. They're all a little bit loose in their bearings. Some have the rickets, and others the heaves or the blind staggers; and a whole lot of 'em are balmy in the bean. All of the highest muck-a-mucks have some peculiar mark, such as the Hapsburg lip, or Queen Mary's hats.

I had dinner at Ruth's right after the count showed up, and I tumbled in a minute that he was a phony nobleman. The only thing polished about his manners was the way he polished off everything in sight. To hear him inhaling soup beat listening to a symphony orchestra.

However, the surest evidence that he wasn't an aristocrat was his appearance. Everybody knows a real blue-blood looks

like something the cat dragged in—but not this bird.

Believe you me, he sure was a humdinger for looks; with the blackest eyes, and the whitest teeth, and the cutest little mustache. A regular old Francis X. Bushranger. He was a swell tennis player too, and could tickle the mandolin to a fare-you-well. And when he sang that song in Italian — that Chilly Billy Beans thing — the girls' eyes would pop out like boiled onions; and they'd sigh till it sounded as if all the steam-pipes in town were leaking. That boy was a lady murderer, for sure.

Old man Holland went around the house about the way Jess Willard looked at the end of the third round. You wouldn't need a telescope to see he didn't hanker for a wop son-in-law.

One night he waylaid me as I was coming in at their gate.

"See here, Jimmy," he said; "this goings-on has got to be stopped."

"What goings-on?" I asked innocently.

"You know well enough," he barked. "It's this dad-burned spaghetti devastator that Marian's wished on us. I don't like the way he mops up soup, and I don't think he's any more a count than you are."

"I always knew you didn't think I was much account," said I.

"Don't you spring any pickings from *Puck* on me." And he fairly danced. "I've always wanted Ruth to marry a regular he-man; but it seems the only kind she likes are beach fleas, dance lizards, and parlor snakes. I'll bet eleven dollars you'll never amount to a hill of beans; but at least you know how to eat without alarming the neighbors. Now it's up to you to chase this stiletto juggler. I don't care how you kill him, as long as it isn't done in the house. The rugs cost me a lot of money."

You may be certain I was just as anxious to get rid of the count as Ruth's father was. But I knew it had to be pulled with circumspection and diplomacy. About the way old boy Machiavelli would do it. I guess you get me. It would be easy enough to gather a bunch of the fellows and give him the razz; but if we did that, he'd be solider than ever with Ruth.

I'll bet I laid awake every night for a week, and smoked a hundred cigarettes over the thing; but I'll be gum-swizzled if I could get up an idea. I read magazines till my head ached, but the only plots that looked good to me were too gory. I didn't intend to mix in anything that might wind me up in a striped suit—not even to please old man Holland.

The thing began to wear on me. I got so I lost my appetite—couldn't eat more than four eggs for breakfast. My folks all noticed it, and father wanted to know if I was expecting to get canned again.

It's awful discouraging to try and think up something, and then find out you have a head like a coconut. But all things come to him who waits, as the man said when he was hit with a five-ton truck. I was getting a hair-cut in the barber shop in our building one day, when I got talking to Tony about the count. After I was started, I never finished till I told him the whole story.

Tony is a wop, too, but he's had a lot of experience. He used to be an actor at the Italian theater on the Bowery; but I guess he's a better barber than he was an actor. It stands to reason a man isn't going to work for a living when he can get it as easy as an actor does. Tony says the reason he quit acting is because he's just busting with artistic temperament; and if he plays a murderer he's just as liable to kill somebody as not. He says nearly all Italian actors are that way, but it sounds like a lot of bunk to me.

Well anyway, Tony said the count was surely a counterfeit. In the first place, he called himself De Luna, which means the moon in English, and he knew for sure there were no counts by that name in Italy. Secondly, all the counts he had seen or heard of were as homely as a mud fence. So that settled that.

Tony said if he was me he'd get rid of the count in less time than it takes Man o' War to run a mile. Tony's idea was to use a bomb or an automatic; and he offered to get a cousin of his who would blow the count half way to Atlantic City for a hundred dollars.

He was much disappointed when I told him I wasn't on speaking terms with a

hundred dollars; and furthermore, had no desire to boost the undertaking business.

He went on clipping my hair for a few minutes, when all of a sudden he let out a yell, and nearly cut my ear off with the scissors. After he used about a yard of court-plaster patching the hole, he apologized, and blamed it on his artistic temperament. It seems a grand inspiration hit him a jolt, and he had to yell over it.

I didn't mind the yell so much, but I hate to have people dig chunks out of me. Tony wouldn't tell me what his scheme was; but he said if I'd give him five dollars and a round-trip ticket, he'd guarantee to chase the count so far it would take six dollars to send him a post card.

I don't like to go into anything blindfold, and we had quite an argument; but he was bull-headed and wouldn't tell me what he intended to do. He said the secret was going to be locked in his breast until the moment came to spring it, and then he'd let me in on it. I finally agreed when he said there wouldn't be any rough stuff.

I was busting to tell old man Holland; but I figured out he'd be more pleased if it came as a surprise. Well, he was surprised all right, but—

Our church pulls off a lawn festival every year, and this time it was to be at the Hollands'. The count was down on the program for a little gargling and mandolin playing; and if that wasn't an opening for an enterprising young man, I wouldn't know where to look for one.

I told Tony to get ready for the grand finale, and he was all set, until I told him it was on Saturday night. Then he went off like the Wall Street bomb. That was his busy day, and he couldn't possibly do it. The end of it was I had to give him twenty dollars. Ouch! It made an awful dent in the bank-roll; because I'm a long way from paying income tax on what I make.

Well, the big night came around. All the haut ton and noblesse of Long Branch were there, also quite considerable of the hoi polloi. They had the place all lit up with Japanese lanterns; and there was a gypsy booth, and a lemonade stand, and—oh, you know all the usual stunts.

Things went along all to the merry, with everybody in their best bib and tucker; and behaving pretty. Finally it came to the count's little act.

He used the front porch for a stage, and he sure did look cute enough to eat without cream or sugar. He wore some kind of a sombrero with fancy ribbons dangling down. Then there was a brown velvet jacket, and a white silk shirt with a big collar. Also, he had on a broad red sash, and his pants flared out at the bottom, with a row of brass buttons running up the sides. The whole effect reminded me of a wedding cake. Some pastry, he was.

He started in to tinkle the mandolin and pipe his little lay. Of course all the girls gathered around with door-knob eyes, as usual.

This was the cue for Tony's entrance, so I edged down to the gate to let him in. He was there all right; and believe you me, he was one ferocious sight. All in rags, and looking as if he hadn't eaten since the big wind in Ireland. When it comes to make-up, Tony don't need to take off his hat to Dave Warfield.

"Now Tony," said I, "before I take you in there I want to know what's coming off. What's the big idea?"

"Sure," says Tony. "I tell you now. I go up in front of the crowd and cry, and say this wop is my son that leaves his poor old father to starve; while he runs around the country telling people he's a count, when he's only a waiter. Maybe he won't get the bums' rush then—hey?"

"Whatever you do," I said, "don't let on you know me."

Well, we moseyed up the walk. Nobody saw us, for they were all watching the count. All of a sudden, Tony gave a wild war-whoop, and burst into the audience like a hose cart going to a fire. He yelled something in Italian, and flew up the steps at the count. Then the count yelled something in Italian at Tony, and Tony punched him in the nose. Whack! went the mandolin on Tony's head; and the count ran down the steps and tore through the crowd with Tony after him. Oh boy! but they made some racket going up the street, with the count about two jumps in the lead.

Maybe there wasn't a commotion around there. All the old hens were cackling at once; and most of the girls didn't know whether to laugh or have hysterics; so they compromised by crying.

Old man Holland came up and grabbed me by the arm. I could see fire and flames shooting out of his eyes. "Who the dickens started that riot?" he yelled. "Did you have anything to do with it?"

I intended to play innocent, and not let on I knew a thing about it; but the way things turned out had me so rattled I didn't know t'other from which, so I blurted out: "Why, that's his father."

"Aha!" howls old man Holland; and he screwed up his face till you couldn't see his eyes. "You young mullet-head," he went on, "you had to disgrace us in front of the whole town, didn't you? You couldn't tell us privately, could you? If that old buzzard, your father, had any sense, he'd have knocked you in the head long ago. You're not fit for fish bait."

Then Marian and Mrs. Holland started in. Oh, what a lacing I got! I'd be ashamed to call a yellow dog the things they mentioned about me. Talk about Inbad the Sailor! They sure sank me without a trace.

You never saw a place so steamed up in your life. It was worse than Broadway the night of the armistice. Everybody was well I nevering and ain't it awfuling all over the place. Then in comes a cop dragging Tony by the back of the neck. Tony pointed at me, and said: "That's the fellow! He gave me twenty dollars to come down here and tell the people this guy that called himself a count was my son."

"He did, did he?" yells old man Holland. "And what right have you got to say he called himself a count? What do you know about him, hey?"

"I know a lot about him," said Tony. "That fellow's right name is Mascaro. He ran a bank on Mulberry Street a couple of years ago, and flew the coop with all the money. He got two hundred of mine—that's why I chased him."

Well, the policeman let Tony go; and I thought of course old man Holland would pin a medal on my manly chest for getting rid of the count. But not so you could notice it. He says if I ever so much as stick my nose in their yard again, he'll hit me with a hammer. I believe he'd do it too. Marian won't speak to me, and father says mother was very fond of children when she raised me.

I certainly am in Dutch all around.

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FIELD FLOWERS

THE simple, little wayside rose
To me is sweeter far,
And more begirt with grace, than those
From sheltered gardens are.
And vagrant shreds of homeless song
May keener pleasures hold
Than to the grander bards belong,
Though bound in silk and gold.

Nixon Waterman.

The Peace Treaty of the Seven Up

by Walter J. Coburn

THE range war between the Seven Up cow outfit—so called not because of any proficiency on the part of the cow-punchers at the card game, but because the steers belonging to Bill Crawford all bore a large 7 U P on their left ribs—and Charlie Henderson, the sheep man, dated some five years back. To be more exact, it began the day that a misguided camp tender from Henderson's outfit, trailing to summer range with three wether bands, crossed the lower end of the Seven Up horse pasture with his woolly charges.. Whereupon, to quote the Seven Up wagon boss, "Hell broke loose."

The casualties resulting were one herder and several hundred sheep. And one or two of Crawford's men carried away souvenirs of the festivities, said souvenirs being samples of sheep herder marksmanhsip with a Winchester.

Ensuing years were enlivened by lawsuits over water rights and range boundaries, occasional shooting affrays, and numerous brawls of minor nature. Henderson's herders and camp tenders drew fighting pay, and there were several riders in the Seven Up outfit—men from the Panhandle and the old Cherokee strip—who were more skilled with six-guns and carbines than they were with a rope or branding iron. The feud was regarded as a second Johnson County war in the making.

Somehow, through it all, Crawford and Henderson had avoided a personal clash. Which was somewhat strange, considering the fact that they were both known to be fearless and quick of temper. Neighboring outfits put it down to the fact that their wives and families kept them from shooting each other on sight.

There was much conjecture as to the outcome of such a duel, which meeting all deemed inevitable. Long standing bets on the result of the battle reposed in the safe at the Antlers Bar.

One day early in August the inevitable occurred.

Crawford, on his way home from the upper range, where a band of sheep had recently trespassed, thereby ruining several square miles of choice grazing land, was in a dangerous humor. The sheep man had that morning received word that two cow-punchers had playfully shot up a sheep wagon.

They met face to face on the town road. Each reached hipward about the same time. The reports of their forty-fives blended as one shot.

Crawford, cursing softly, swung from his horse, his left arm dangling uselessly at his side, the bone broken four inches above the elbow by the soft-nosed bullet from Henderson's gun.

Henderson lay where he had fallen from

his saddle. The blood was oozing slowly through the bushy gray hair above his ear. Crawford's eyes clouded as he stood above the still form of the sheep man. Henderson looked peaceful enough, lying there with his eyes closed. By this time Bill Crawford was beginning to regret his hasty action.

Beside Henderson's body lay a sheet of paper. Scarcely knowing why he did so, the cattle man picked it up and examined it. It was a prescription blank, such as the drug stores furnish to doctors. Crawford made out Dr. Tucker's signature at the lower right-hand corner. The prescription was written in the doctor's most illegible scrawl.

Forgetful of his wound and of the still form at his feet, Crawford's thoughts were busy deducting the why and wherefore of the prescription.

"Bet it's that youngest kid uh his," he muttered to himself. "The schoolmarm sent all the kids home day before yesterday 'count uh scarlet fever epidemic. An' that young un uh Henderson's looks plumb delicate. I seen doc headin' that way yesterday. Why in hell didn't Henderson say he was goin' after medicine?"

He turned to the big roan that was snorting gently, half frightened from the shooting. "Drifter," he said, "reckon it's me an' you for it."

Stuffing the prescription in his pocket, he mounted, wincing slightly at the pain in his arm. Heading his horse toward town, he wrapped the reins around the saddlehorn and made a tourniquet of the silk handkerchief he removed from about his neck.

This checked the flow of blood somewhat, but his lips were taut with the throbbing pain. It was ten miles to town and thirty back to Henderson's ranch. His jaws tightened as he thought of the hours to come.

"Fill this, Bud," he greeted the astonished drug clerk. "Fill it quick! If it ain't done in five minutes you'll never live to roll another pill. Do it in three, and you get ten bucks! And get me a quart of whisky before you start!"

He thrust the prescription into the clerk's hand and pushed him toward the rear of the store.

Four minutes later Crawford was in the saddle, headed south. In his saddle pocket was a package wrapped in the green drug store wrapping paper. The quart of whisky was in his chaps pocket. A mile from town he quit the stage road and headed the roan for a high butte that was Henderson's landmark.

The short cut meant swimming two creeks, made dangerous by recent rains, but it also meant shortening the distance by ten miles.

His wounded arm throbbed, ached, and grew numb by turns. Now and then he drank from the bottle in his chaps pocket. The plunge into the first creek revived him greatly. But he never remembered crossing the second, three miles above the Henderson ranch. He rode subconsciously, clinging to the saddlehorn, his eyes closed, his face pale and drawn from pain and loss of blood.

Mrs. Henderson had just lit the big lamp in the front room when she heard the clatter of hoofs in the dusk outside. Curiously she opened the door. The rays of the lamp, shining through the doorway, threw into relief the weird scene. The big roan, gaunt, sweat streaked, stood with lowered head. The tall rider, swaying dizzily, was fumbling with the package in his saddle pocket. The sheep man's wife was of sturdy stock. Not many years had passed since she had helped her husband in the hay fields. She was not unused to strange sights. Therefore she met the emergency with the calmness of a man, half dragging, half carrying, the unconscious form of the cow man into the front room and placing him on the broad sofa.

"Charlie!" she called. "Come downstairs. There's a man here drunk. No, he's hurt! There's blood all over his shirt!"

A big, red-faced man with a snowy bandage tied about his head came thumping down the uncarpeted stairs. His blue eyes widened strangely as he recognized the cattle man.

"Get some hot water and bandages, Sue," he said. "It's Crawford. Reckon he's been hooked by a cow or something."

The cattle man's eyes opened slowly. His gaze rested on the man who was bathing his wound.

"Am I drunk, er jest kind o' loco? Are you Henderson, or a spook?" he asked faintly.

"Better not talk, Crawford. You've been hurt. Steer hooked you, by the looks of your arm." Henderson's left eyelid lowered meaningly as he made an almost imperceptible gesture toward his wife, just entering with a roll of bandages. "This must be a regular day set aside for accidents," he continued. "My horse fell with me this morning, and I came to in the road an hour or so later with a cut in my scalp."

Crawford waited till the woman had left the room, then spoke. "I'm shore glad I didn't get yuh, Henderson. Didn't know yuh was goin' fer medicine. Hell—" The cattle man's right hand came into view, still clutching the green package. "Here's the stuff fer the kid. I got yore perscription filled."

"Perscription? I don't understand. I—"

"Shore! The one you was packin'! I knew it must be one uh the kids sick. So I rode on in with it."

"You made that ride with your arm like that? To get medicine for my kid? To fill that perscription I was packin'?"

"Shore thing. Sick kids is hell. I know. Got three kids uh my own."

"Crawford," said the sheep man softly, a suspicion of moisture in his eyes, "I never knew what a white man you were till now. Don't you think it's time we quit this scrapping and started in being friends?"

"Hell, yes! I bin fed up fer a long time on this shootin' business," grinned Crawford as their hands gripped. "How's the kid comin' along? Better take this here medicine to him."

"You bet! Reckon this will bring him around in no time. We've a lot to thank you for. You've probably saved his life." There was a queer smile on the sheep man's face as he tiptoed out of the room. Crawford's eyes had closed in the sleep of utter exhaustion.

"Howdy, doc!" the drug clerk greeted Dr. Tucker. "Back in town again, eh? Hard trip?"

"Not very hard. Just out vaccinating Henderson's kids. Gave the missus a formula for a solution to keep her hair from getting gray. Regular beauty specialist these days, Bud."

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Maybe, being so high in the profession, you can explain why Bill Crawford busted in here to-day looking like he'd seen a ghost and slipped me ten bucks for filling that same hair tonic prescription with sheep tallies scribbled all over the back of it?"

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THE SOURCE OF THE SMILE.

SHE smiled at me! I knew not why,
But that she smiled is not a lie,
But I—I looked an awful "guy,"
For—let me heave a heartfelt sigh!—
I soon found out what was her cue—
There was a freakish wind that blew—
To catch my hat I had to try—
She smiled at me! Then I knew why!

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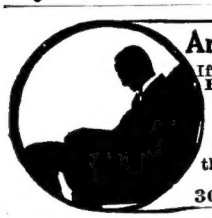

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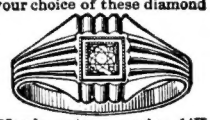

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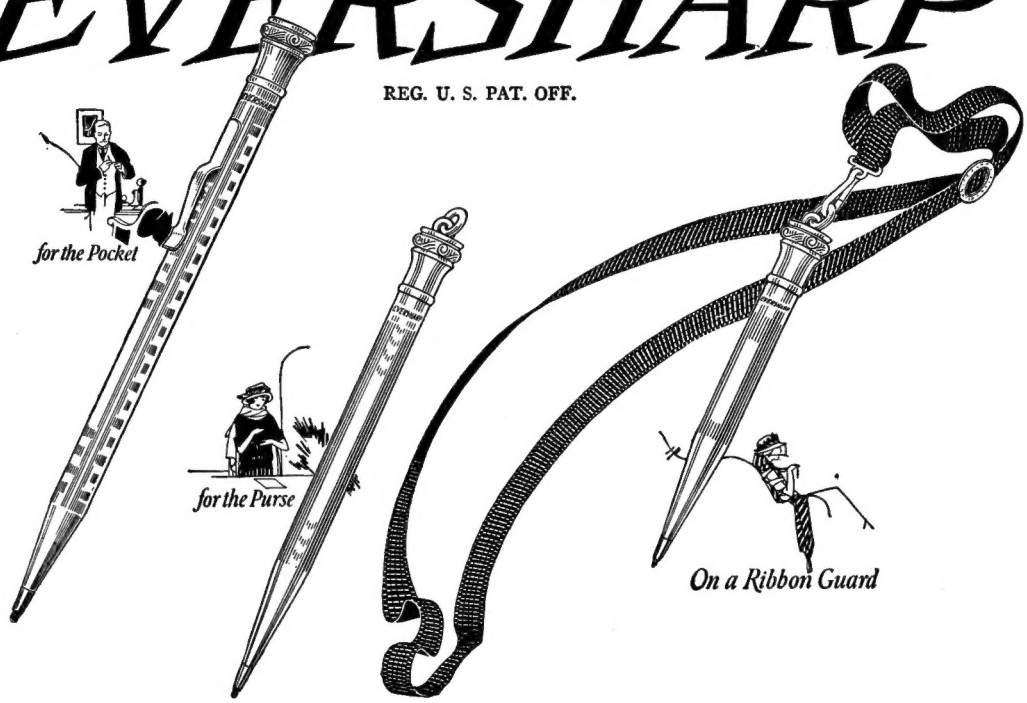

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Use only EVERSHARP *Leads. They fit accurately the exclusive* EVERSHARP *tip. Seven grades:*
2B—Extra Soft
B—Soft
HB—Medium Soft
F—Firm
H—Medium Hard
2H—Hard
4H—Very Hard
Also Indelible.
Ask the office manager to supply you with EVERSHARP *Leads in the red top box.*

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The Hinds Cre-Maids
Can bring to you
Health and Beauty
And Comfort true.

Summer Days

In summer places, on hills or sands,
You'll find your complexion, your arms and hands
Will need protection from wind and sun;
Then let the Cre-Maids bring this one.

Cool Hinds Honey and Almond Cream
For mid-summer comfort reigns supreme;
For no matter how "blowy" or hot the day,
Sunburn or windburn it keeps away.

For "hiking" blisters, for bites and stings,
An instant relief it always brings;
Dust irritations soon disappear,
Leaving your skin soft, smooth and clear.

Constant use throughout summer days
Is a healthful habit that always pays,
And every outing a treat will seem
If you take Hinds Honey and Almond Cream.

TO PREVENT SUNBURN. Use Hinds Honey and Almond Cream before and after exposure; also morning and night to keep the skin soft. If the skin is inflamed and sore, do *not rub it*, but moisten a piece of soft linen or absorbent cotton with the Cream and lay it on the skin for a half hour or longer; repeat until relieved. It will quickly cool the burned surface and prevent blistering or peeling.

WONDERFUL BASE FOR FACE POWDER. The liquid Hinds Honey and Almond Cream is now used for this purpose with marvelous success. Moisten the skin slightly with the cream; let it nearly dry, then dust on the powder. It will adhere to perfection.

AS A MANICURING AID THIS CREAM softens the cuticle, prevents soreness and preserves the lustre of the nails.

AN AFTER-SHAVE COMFORT. Every man who tries it is gratified by its quick action in soothing, cooling and healing scrapes, sore spots and cuts.

You will find the Hinds Week-End Box especially convenient and useful now, as it contains those essentials for the comfort and attractiveness of the face and hands. Trial size, Hinds Honey and Almond Cream, Cold and Disappearing Cream, Soap, Talc and Face Powder. 50 cents.

Try your dealer first. Write us if not easily obtainable.

All druggists and department stores sell Hinds Honey and Almond Cream. We will mail you a small sample for 2c or trial bottle for 6c. Booklet *Free*.

Ask your dealer for Hinds Superior Toilet Requisites, but if not obtainable, order from us. We send postpaid in the U. S.

A. S. HINDS CO., Dept. 10, Portland, Me.